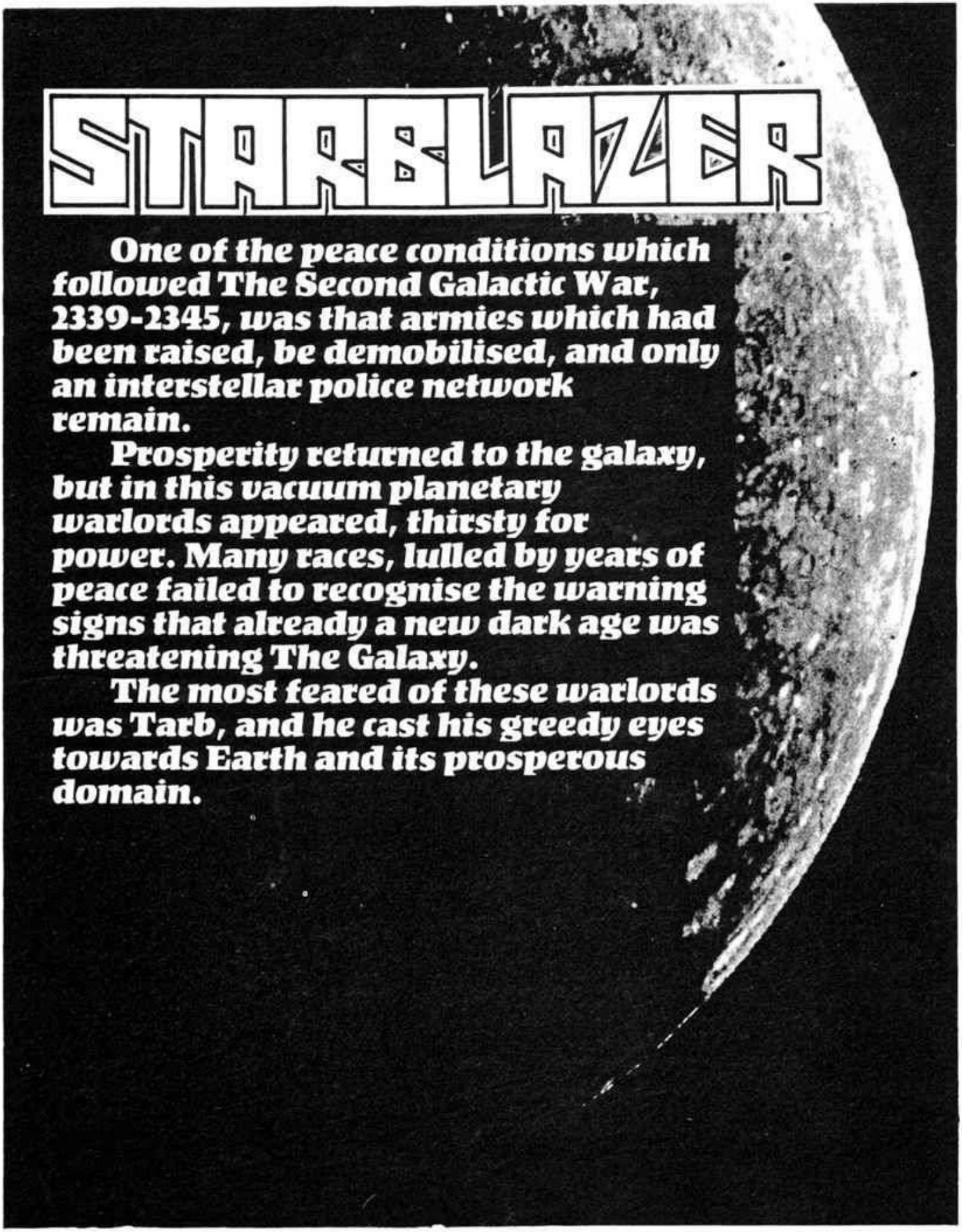
STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 146

22p

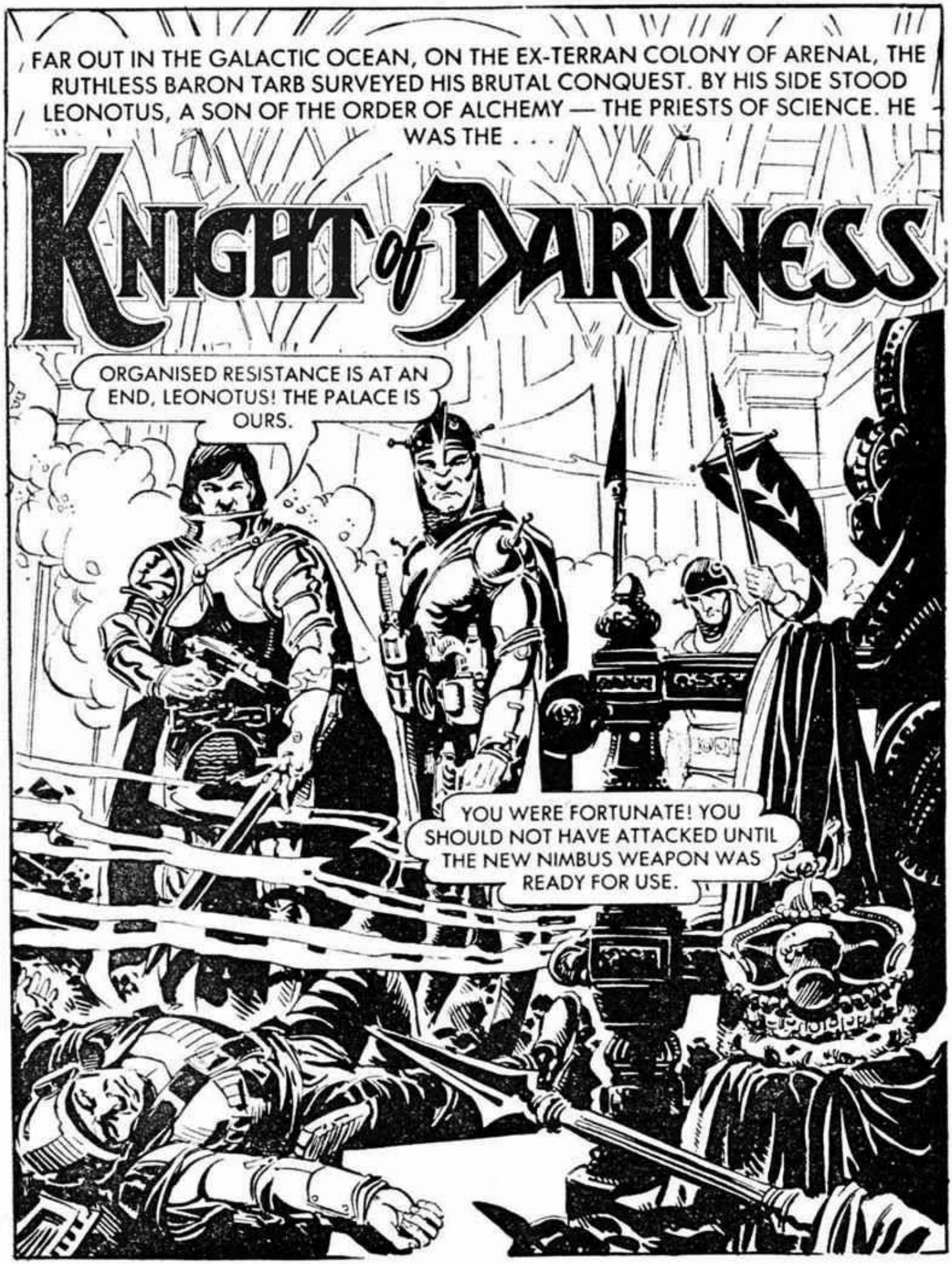
KNIGHT of DARKNESS



One of the peace conditions which followed The Second Galactic War, 2339-2345, was that armies which had been raised, be demobilised, and only an interstellar police network remain.

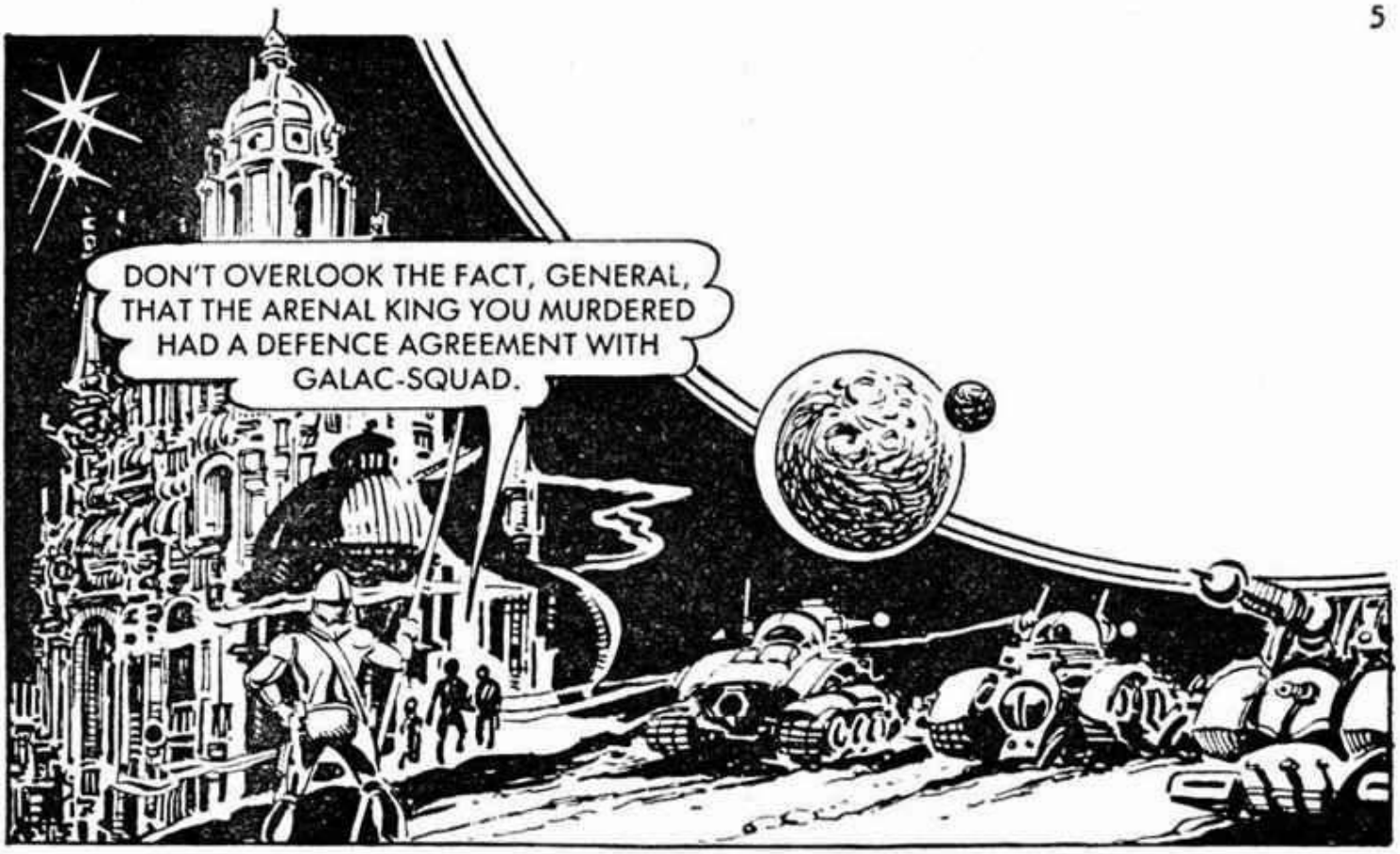
Prosperity returned to the galaxy, but in this vacuum planetary warlords appeared, thirsty for power. Many races, lulled by years of peace failed to recognise the warning signs that already a new dark age was threatening The Galaxy.

The most feared of these warlords was Tarb, and he cast his greedy eyes towards Earth and its prosperous domain.

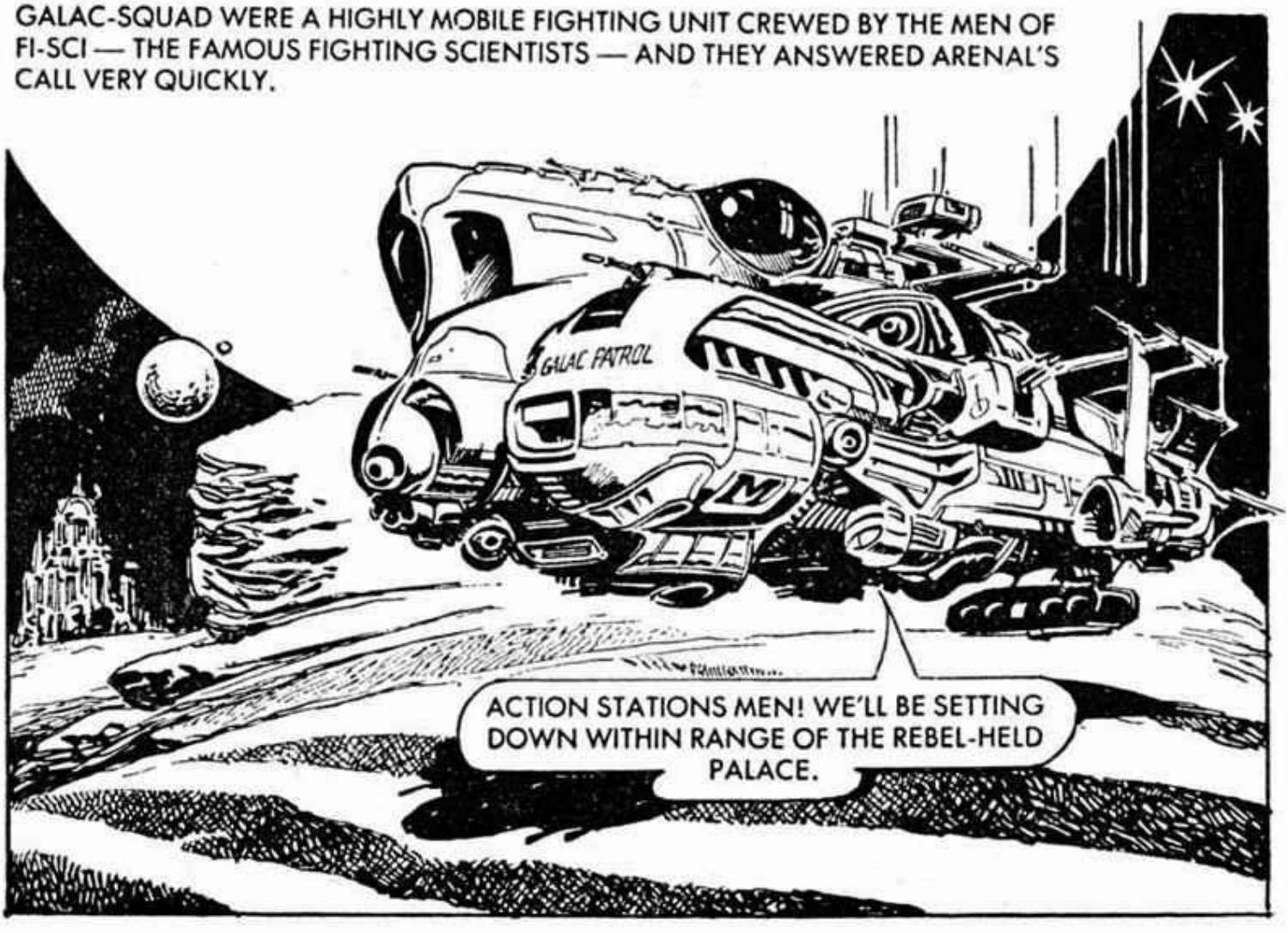

FAR OUT IN THE GALACTIC OCEAN, ON THE EX-TERRAN COLONY OF ARENAL, THE RUTHLESS BARON TARB SURVEYED HIS BRUTAL CONQUEST. BY HIS SIDE STOOD LEONOTUS, A SON OF THE ORDER OF ALCHEMY — THE PRIESTS OF SCIENCE. HE WAS THE . . .
KNIGHT of DARKNESS
ORGANISED RESISTANCE IS AT AN END, LEONOTUS! THE PALACE IS OURS.
YOU WERE FORTUNATE! YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE ATTACKED UNTIL THE NEW NIMBUS WEAPON WAS READY FOR USE.

I HAD NO NEED OF YOUR SO-CALLED WONDER-WEAPON, LEONOTUS. THE FACT THAT WE HAVE WON IS PROOF THAT WE WERE STRONG ENOUGH WITHOUT IT.

YOU FOUGHT WELL! NOW THAT POWER IS OURS, AND I AM IN CHARGE, OUR PLANET SHALL BECOME THE EQUAL TO OTHER FEDERATED TERRAN-PLANETS.



GALAC-SQUAD WERE A HIGHLY MOBILE FIGHTING UNIT CREWED BY THE MEN OF FI-SCI — THE FAMOUS FIGHTING SCIENTISTS — AND THEY ANSWERED ARENAL'S CALL VERY QUICKLY.



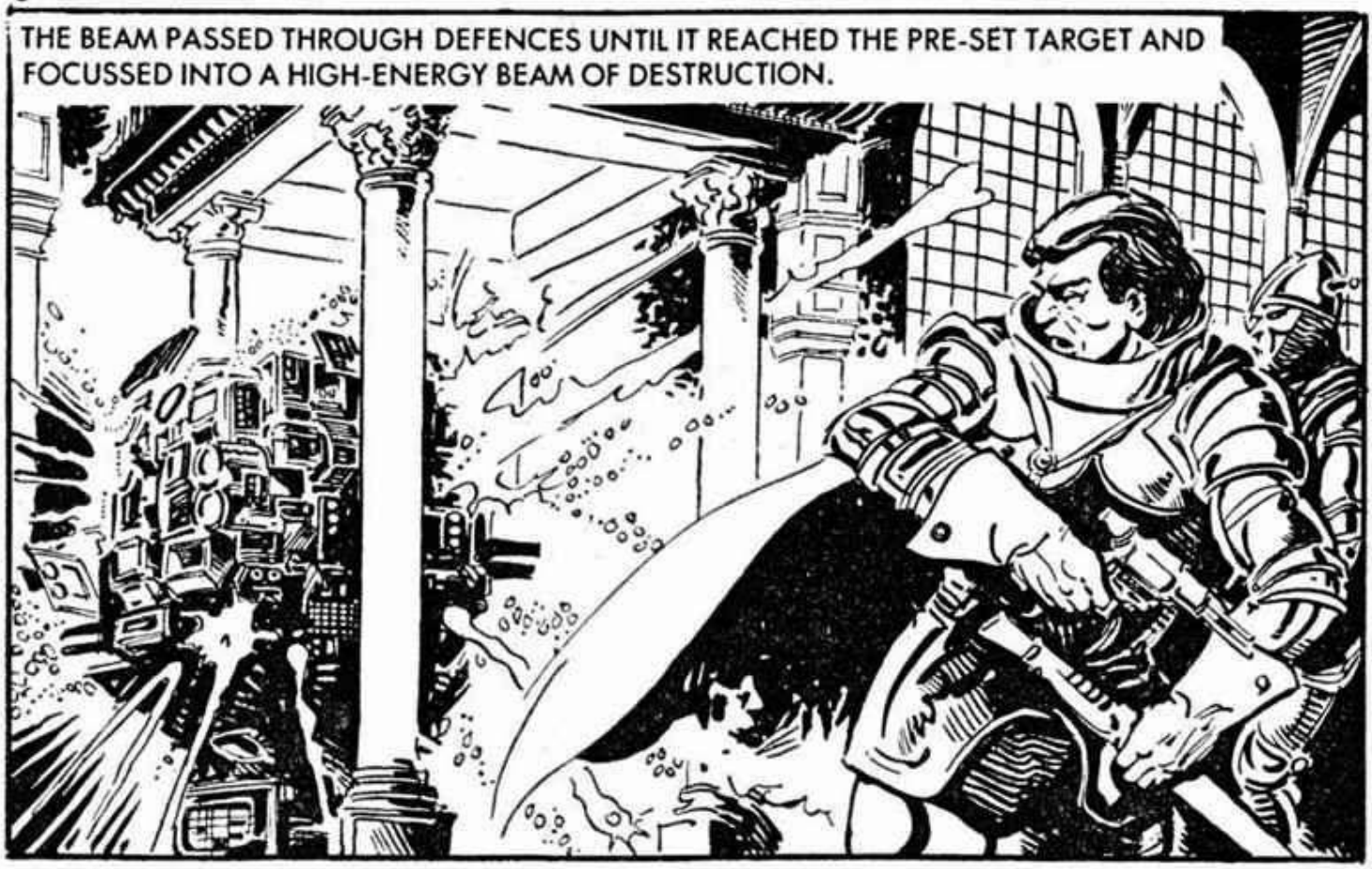
FROM THE PALACE, GENERAL TARB WATCHED THE GALAC-SQUAD CRAFT WITH APPREHENSION—
WE HAVE NOTHING CAPABLE OF PENETRATING THAT.

ON BOARD THE FI-SCI CRAFT WERE GENERAL PLUTO, AND ACE OPERATIVE, HADRON HALLEY.
SPOTTED ANYTHING, HADRON?
I THINK SO!

THE ELECTRO-SCAN HAS LOCATED A TARGET!

HADRON BEAMED DOWN TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF ARENAL'S CAPITAL, CANPASTIA.
MY RADAR-GUIDED THERMOWAVE IS FIXED ON THE TARGET. ALL I NEED IS AN UNINTERUPTED VIEW OF THE TARGET.

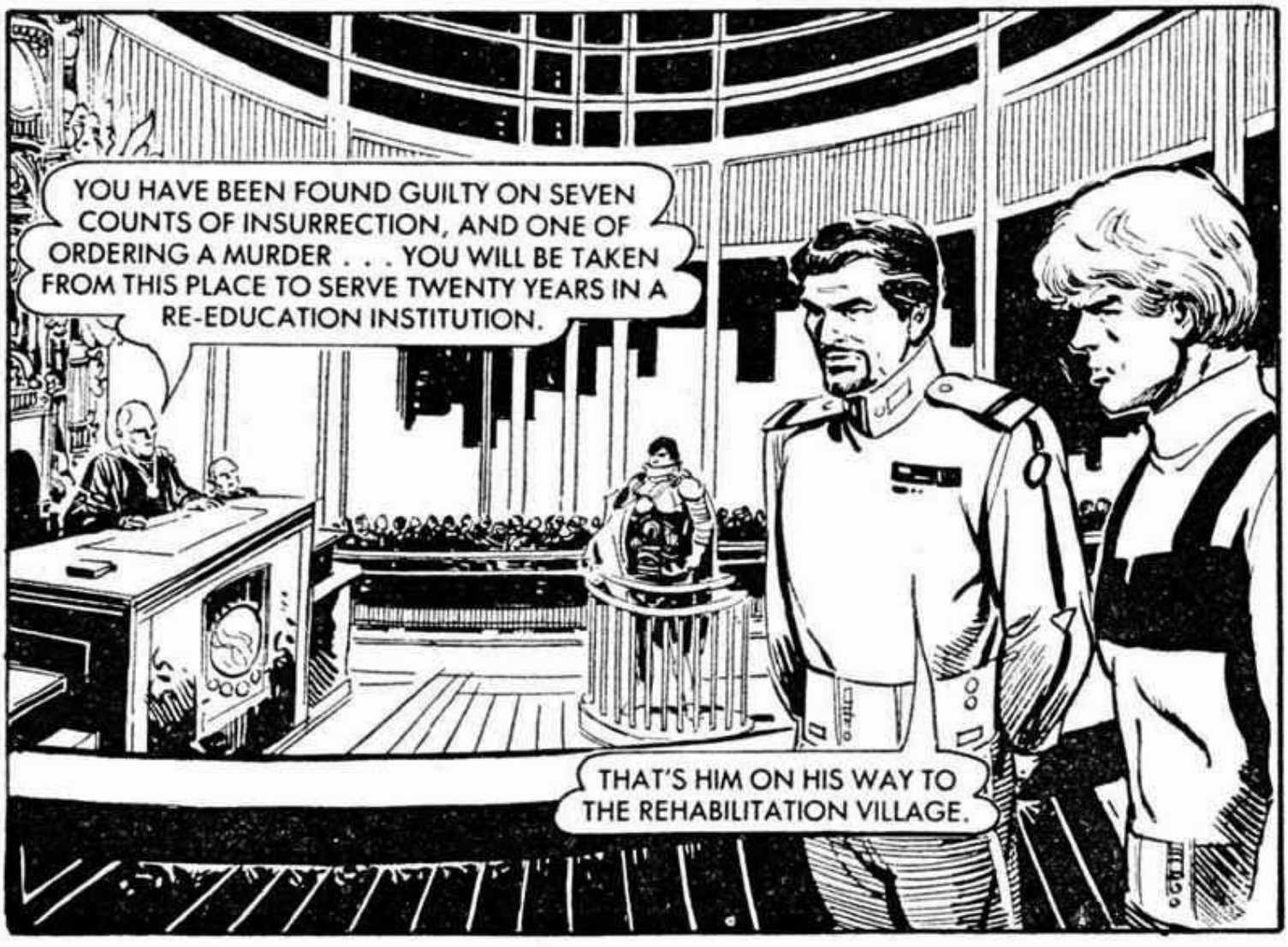
HADRON AIMED AT TARB'S COMPUTER.
THAT SHOULD DO IT! ELECTRONICS WILL DO THE REST.


THE BEAM PASSED THROUGH DEFENCES UNTIL IT REACHED THE PRE-SET TARGET AND FOCUSSED INTO A HIGH-ENERGY BEAM OF DESTRUCTION.

IN YOU GO LADS, THERE'S NOTHING TO GET IN YOUR WAY NOW.

WITHOUT SUPPORT FROM THE NOW INEFFECTIVE DEFENCE SYSTEMS, TARB'S MEN COULD ONLY MOUNT A TOKEN RESISTANCE TO THE GALAC-SQUAD TROOPERS.
TARB KNEW WHEN RESISTANCE WAS USELESS.
THAT NEW CIRRUS-BEAM WORKED WELL. THERE'S A LARGER VERSION WHICH WILL SHORTLY BE FITTED AS STANDARD EQUIPMENT IN ALL THE SHIPS OF THE BATTLE-FLEET.
AH, MISTER TARB. . . . ALWAYS THE TROUBLEMAKER. YOU'LL BE INTERROGATED BACK AT STARBASE-ONE. EVENTUALLY YOU WILL BE TRIED.
THERE'S NO TRACE OF LEONOTUS. PITY, I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO MEET A SCIENTIST OF HIS REPUTE.

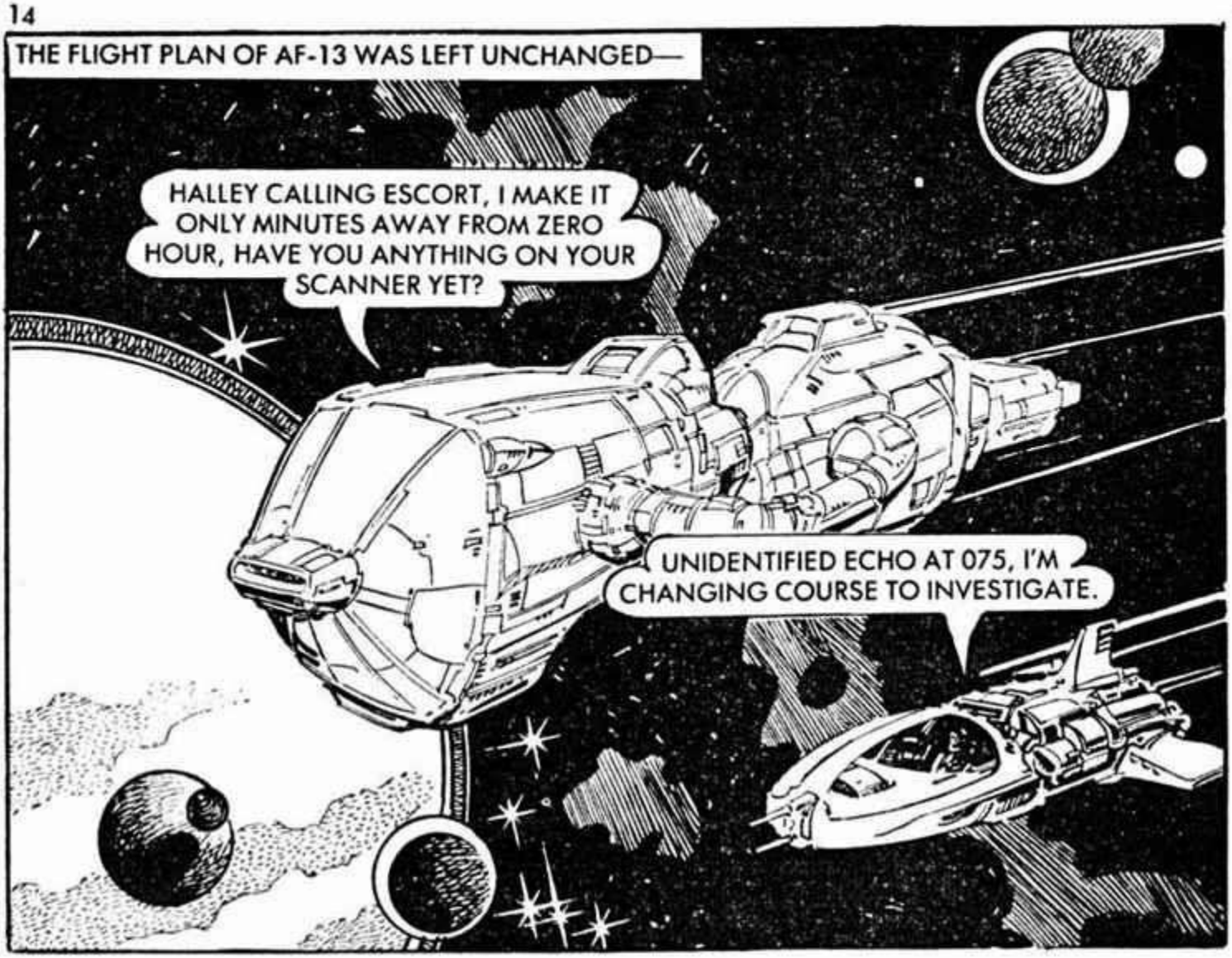
MANY UNITS LATER, AT STARBASE ONE, THE WAR CRIMES TRIAL OF BARON TARB REACHED ITS CLIMAX . . .
STARBASE 1


YOU HAVE BEEN FOUND GUILTY ON SEVEN COUNTS OF INSURRECTION, AND ONE OF ORDERING A MURDER . . . YOU WILL BE TAKEN FROM THIS PLACE TO SERVE TWENTY YEARS IN A RE-EDUCATION INSTITUTION.
THAT'S HIM ON HIS WAY TO THE REHABILITATION VILLAGE.

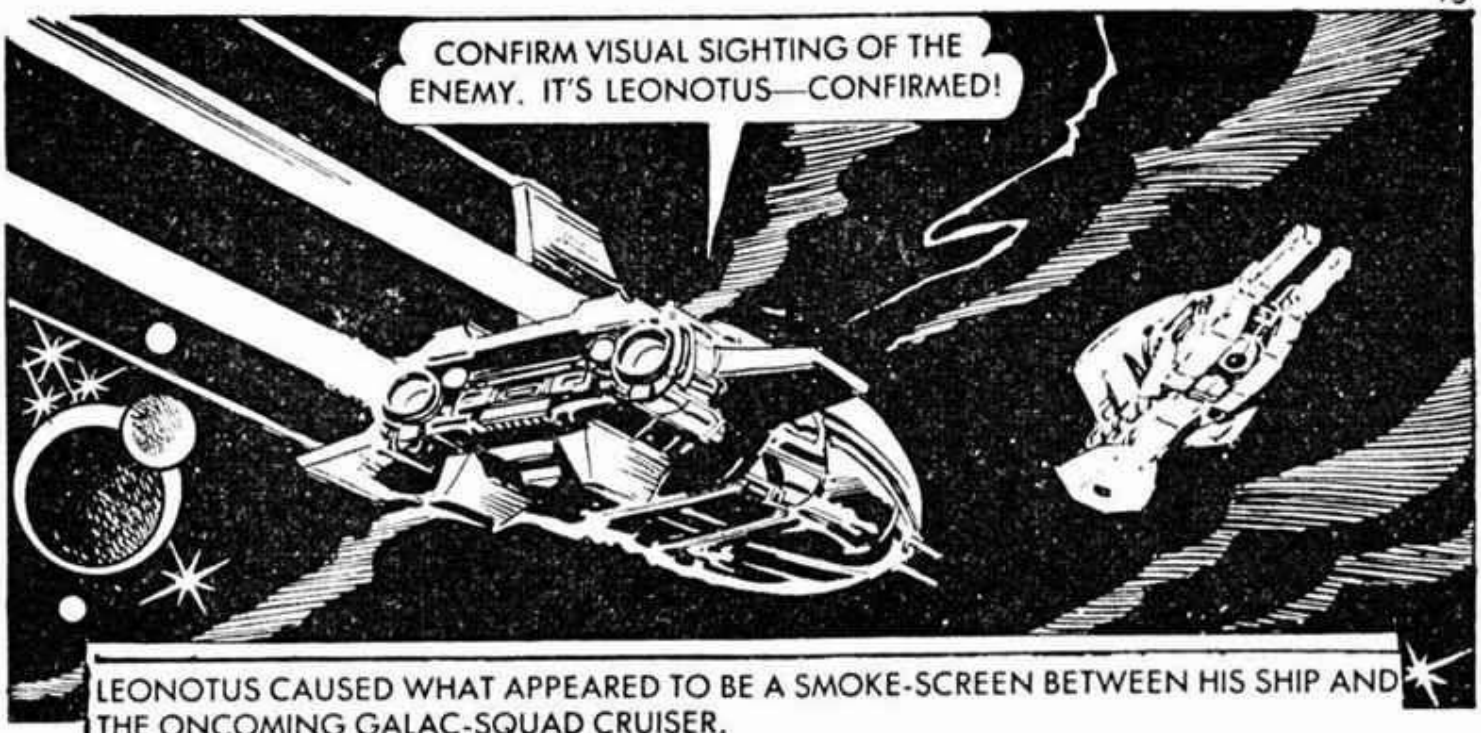
YOUR " HUMANE " JUSTICE WILL BE THE DEATH OF YOU . . . FORGET NOT.
GUARDS, REMOVE THE PRISONER!
A LAST DEFIANT GESTURE!
I'M NOT SO SURE! WE STILL HAVEN'T LOCATED LEONOTUS.

WITHIN A SHORT TIME, FROM DEEP, DEEP SPACE—
THIS IS LEONOTUS CALLING GENERAL LARZ PLUTO AT STARBASE ONE. STANDBY FOR YOUR INSTRUCTIONS . . .

YOU WILL RELEASE BARON TARB, OR ELSE I WILL DESTROY SPACE-FREIGHTER ALPHA-FOXTROT IN 24 OF YOUR EARTH HOURS.
I THINK HE'S BLUFFING! STILL WE'D BETTER TAKE PRECAUTIONS.
I DON'T . . . CAN I HAVE AUTHORITY TO ARRANGE PROTECTION FOR AF-13?
GENERAL LARZ GAVE HADRON FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTING AF-13.


THE FLIGHT PLAN OF AF-13 WAS LEFT UNCHANGED—
HALLEY CALLING ESCORT, I MAKE IT ONLY MINUTES AWAY FROM ZERO HOUR, HAVE YOU ANYTHING ON YOUR SCANNER YET?
UNIDENTIFIED ECHO AT 075, I'M CHANGING COURSE TO INVESTIGATE.

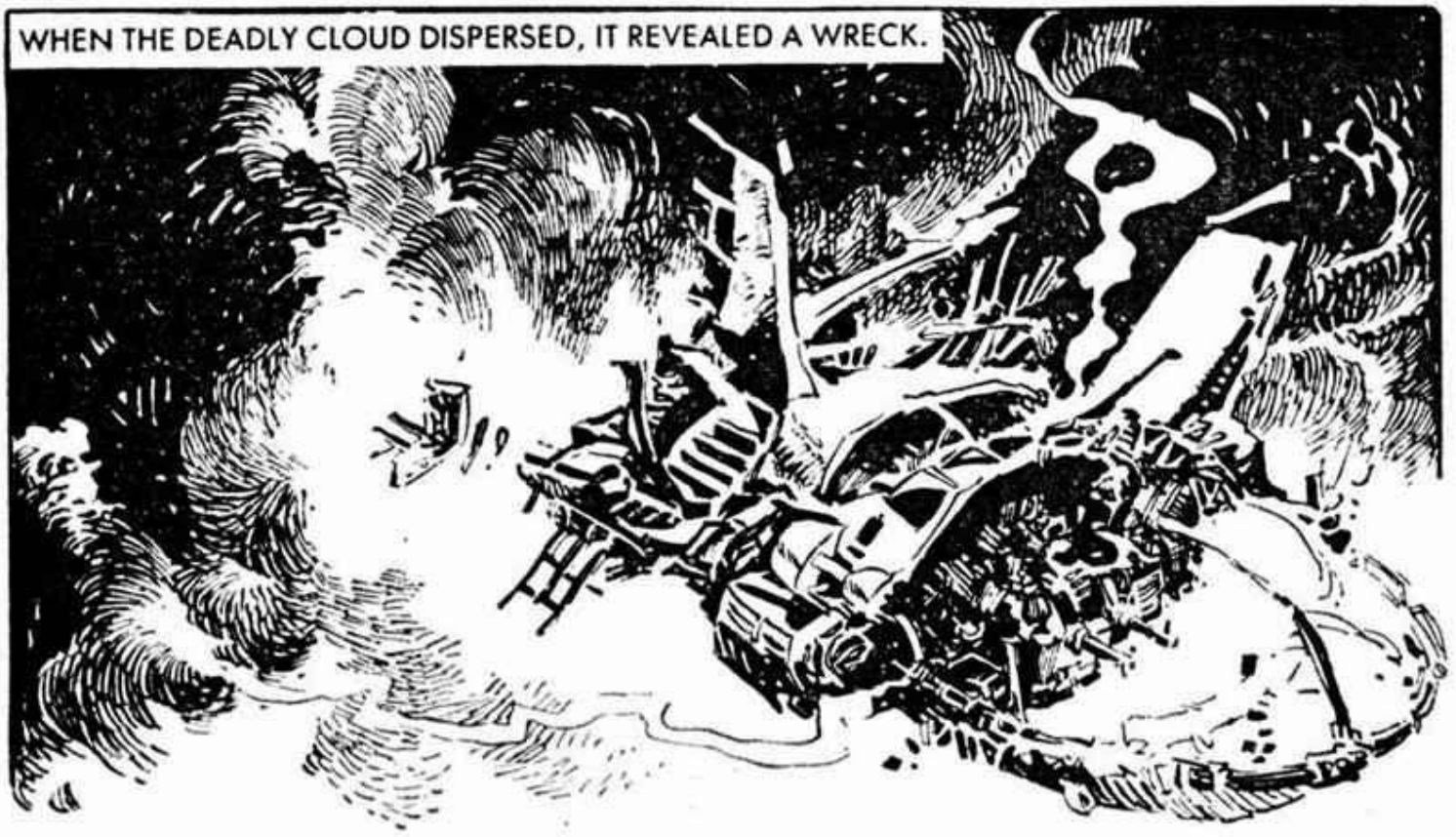
HADRON HAD SET UP HIS COMMAND CENTRE ON THE FREIGHTER. EVERY DETAIL OF THE POSSIBLE ATTACK WAS TO BE RELAYED TO THE FI-SCI LABS FOR ANALYSIS.
THE SOONER I CAN DIAGNOSE WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST, THE EASIER IT WILL BE TO DEFEND OURSELVES.

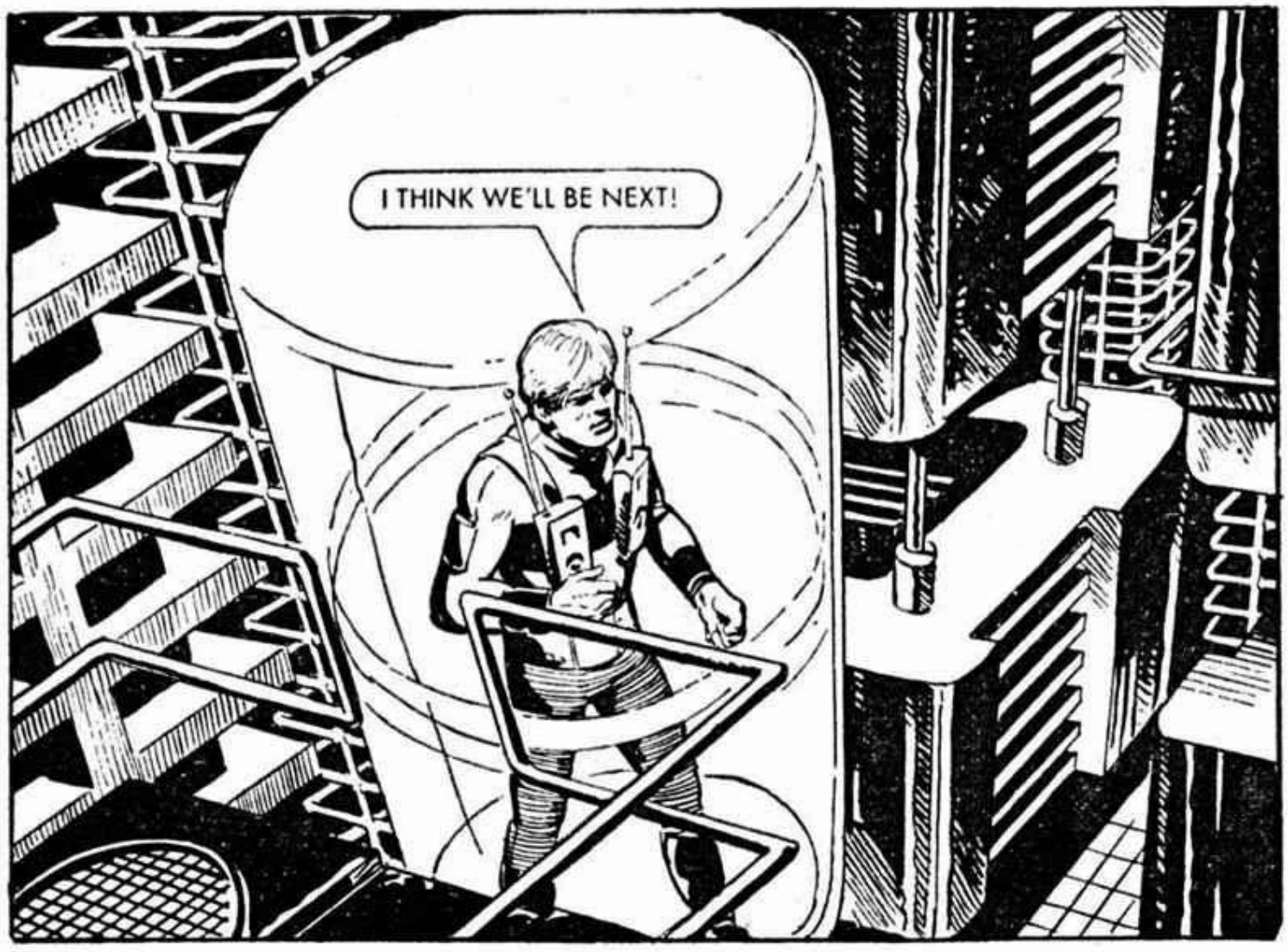


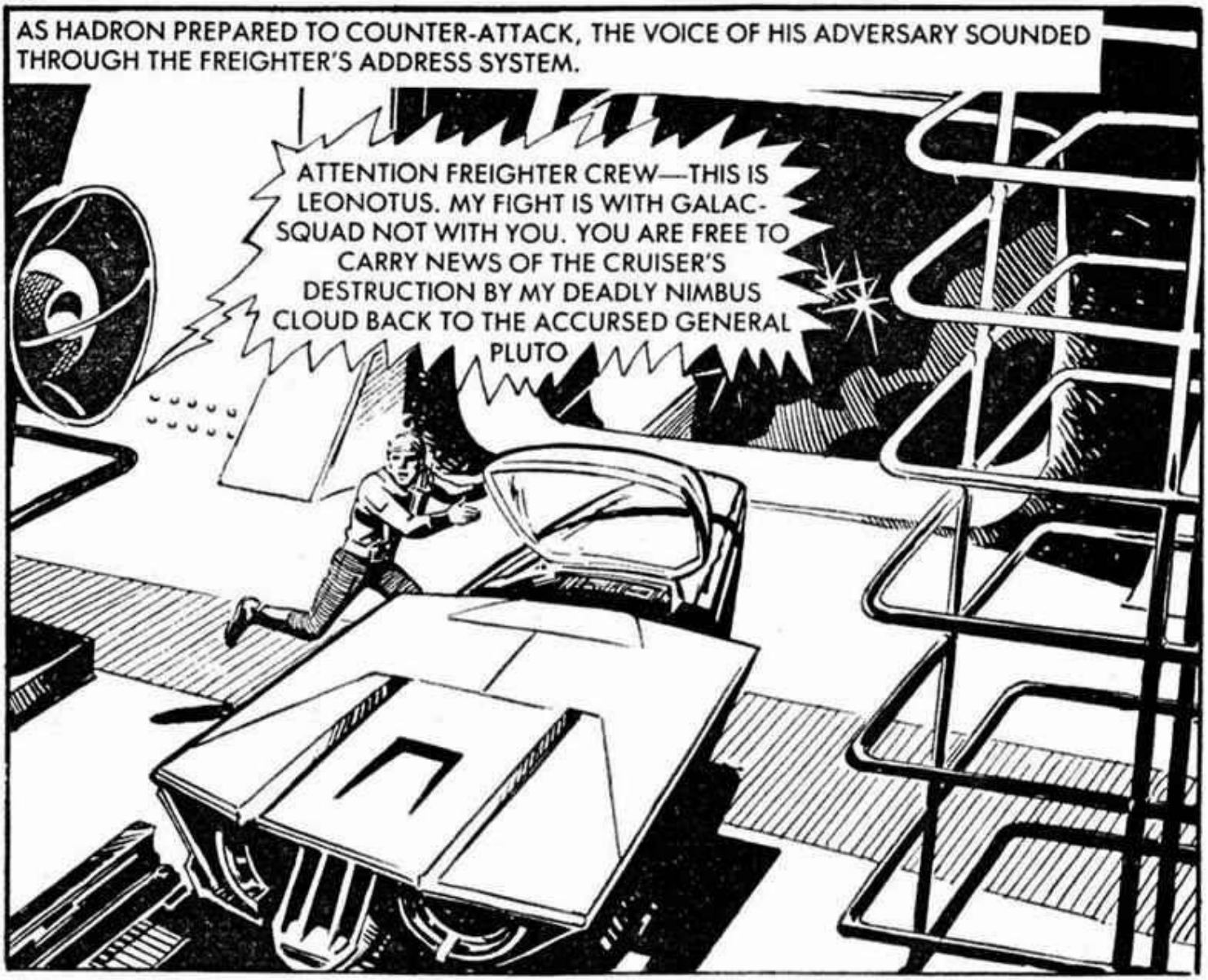
LEONOTUS CAUSED WHAT APPEARED TO BE A SMOKE-SCREEN BETWEEN HIS SHIP AND THE ONCOMING GALAC-SQUAD CRUISER.

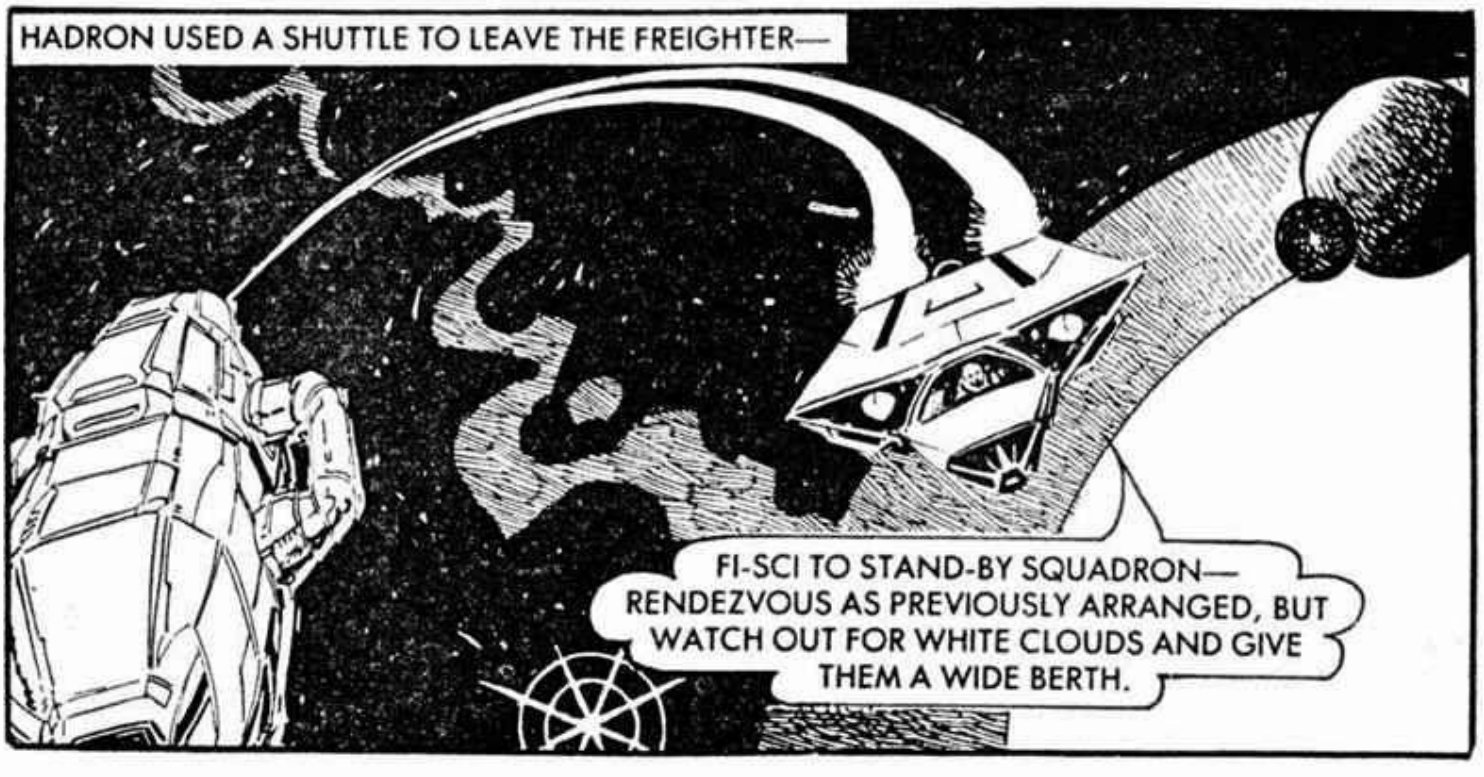
I'VE GOT A TOTAL TRANSMISSION LOSS WITH THE CRUISER!

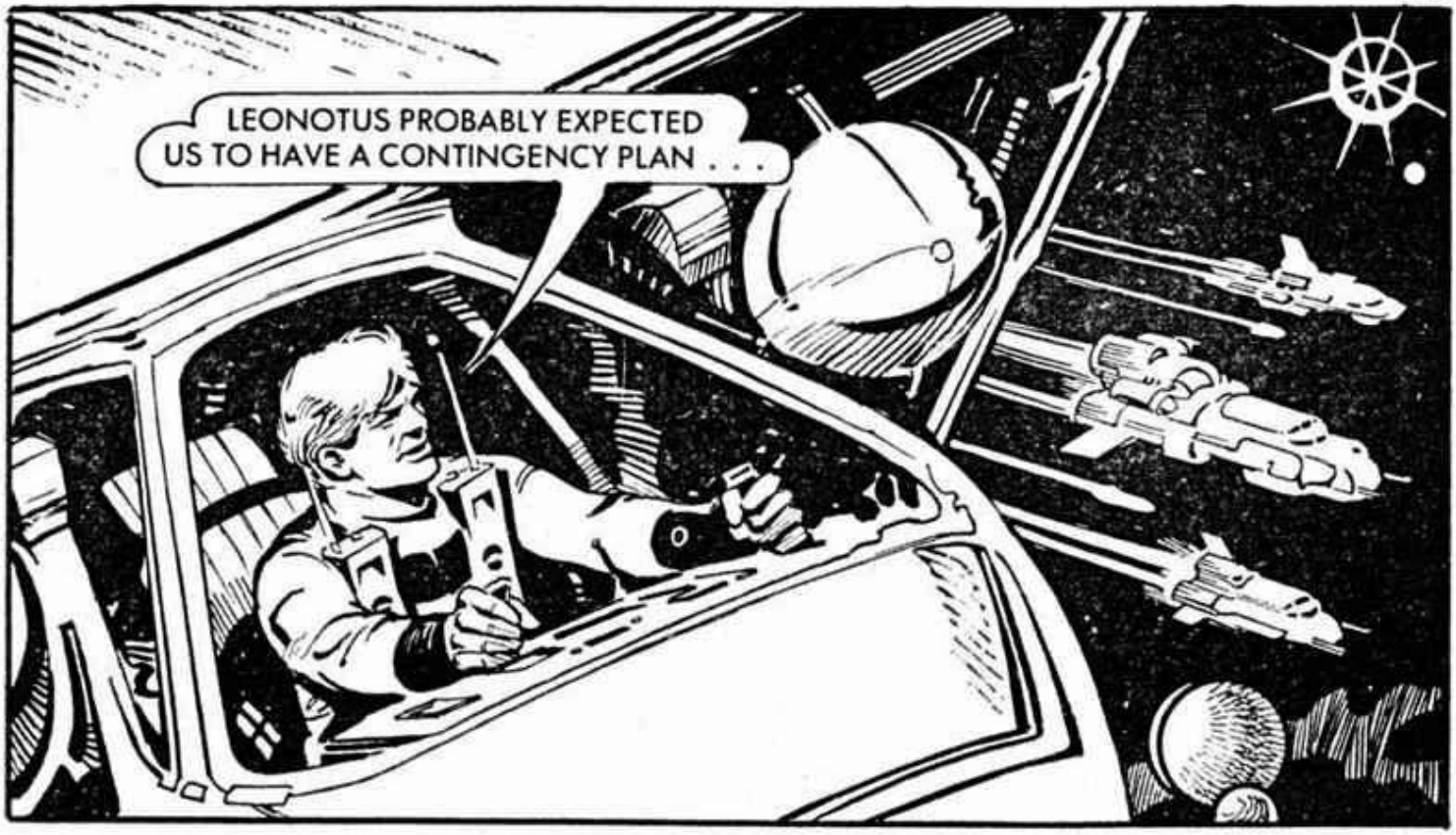
WITH AN ELECTRONIC BLACKOUT, ALL HADRON COULD DO TO GET INFORMATION WAS TO LOOK OUT OF A VIEW PORT.
JUPE, THE CRUISER'S BEEN ENGULFED.


WHEN THE DEADLY CLOUD DISPERSED, IT REVEALED A WRECK.


I THINK WE'LL BE NEXT!


AS HADRON PREPARED TO COUNTER-ATTACK, THE VOICE OF HIS ADVERSARY SOUNDED THROUGH THE FREIGHTER'S ADDRESS SYSTEM.
ATTENTION FREIGHTER CREW—THIS IS LEONOTUS. MY FIGHT IS WITH GALAC-SQUAD NOT WITH YOU. YOU ARE FREE TO CARRY NEWS OF THE CRUISER'S DESTRUCTION BY MY DEADLY NIMBUS CLOUD BACK TO THE ACCURSED GENERAL PLUTO


HADRON USED A SHUTTLE TO LEAVE THE FREIGHTER—
FI-SCI TO STAND-BY SQUADRON—RENDEZVOUS AS PREVIOUSLY ARRANGED, BUT WATCH OUT FOR WHITE CLOUDS AND GIVE THEM A WIDE BERTH.


LEONOTUS PROBABLY EXPECTED US TO HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN . . .

. . . BUT YOU CAN'T PLAN FOR THINGS YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT! THE NIMBUS DOESN'T REGISTER ON MY SCANNERS. DIRECT VISUAL CONTACT IS NO SORT OF WARNING AT THE SPEEDS WE TRAVEL.

LEONOTUS HAD LEFT SOMETHING LYING IN WAIT —
THE DEADLY WEAPON SATELLITES OPENED FIRE —
IT'S A TRAP! ENGAGE THOSE WEAPON-SATTS WITH CIRRUS-BEAM FIRE!

AS THE REST OF THE SQUADRON FOUGHT THE WEAPON-SATTS, HADRON CLOSED WITH THE MAIN CRAFT.
HE'S ENCASING HIMSELF IN CLOUD, BUT THAT WON'T SAVE HIM. THE CIRRUS-BEAM CAN PENETRATE ANY FORCE-FIELD.
BUT —
DEFLECTED! BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD!

AT STARBASE-ONE, HADRON GAVE HIS REPORT TO THE INNER WAR-COUNCIL.
THE NIMBUS IS A RADIATION SHROUD WHICH MAKES ALL OUR ELECTRONICALLY CONTROLLED WEAPONS USELESS, AND OUR SCANNERS INEFFECTIVE. HOWEVER, ITS USES ARE MORE DEFENSIVE THAN OFFENSIVE.

OUR CRUISER WAS NOT LOST BY AN OFFENSIVE ACTION BY LEONOTUS — IN FACT, THE CRUISER'S ION BURST WAS DEFLECTED BY THE RADIATION SHROUD. THE CRUISER SHOT ITSELF DOWN.
BUT BEFORE A PLAN OF ATTACK COULD BE DRAWN UP, AN ALARM SCREEN BURST INTO LIFE.
LEONOTUS HAS MADE A SECOND DEMAND FOR THE RELEASE OF TARB, *THIS TIME HE THREATENS TO DESTROY EARTH UNLESS WE COMPLY!*
CAN LEONOTUS CARRY OUT HIS THREAT, HADRON?
ONLY IF HE SURROUNDS EARTH WITH THE NIMBUS. SOLAR RADIATION IS THEN CUT OUT AND THE ATMOSPHERE FREEZES.

MY ORDERS ARE TO WITHDRAW THE ENTIRE BATTLE-FLEET TO EARTH. YOU, OF COURSE, HAVE FULL PERMISSION TO GO YOUR OWN WAY.
I'M OFF TO ARENAL. WE'LL MEET AGAIN — IF MY PLAN WORKS.
HADRON'S PLAN WAS TO FIGHT LEONOTUS WITH NON-ELECTRONIC WEAPONS, BUT SUCH OBSOLETE EQUIPMENT WAS ONLY TO BE FOUND ON A BACKWARD WORLD LIKE ARENAL.
IT IS ODD THAT INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPED ON ARENAL CAN BE OVERCOME BY THEIR OWN CRUDE WEAPONS.

HADRON SWOOPED DOWN —
NO ANSWER TO MY CALL SIGNS . . .
ONCE LANDED —
I NEED TO SEE THE COMMANDER AT ONCE.
WE DON'T TAKE ORDERS FROM EARTHMEN!

HADRON FELL UNDER A HAIL OF BLOWS —

SO YOU WANT TO SEE THE COMMANDER, DO YOU?

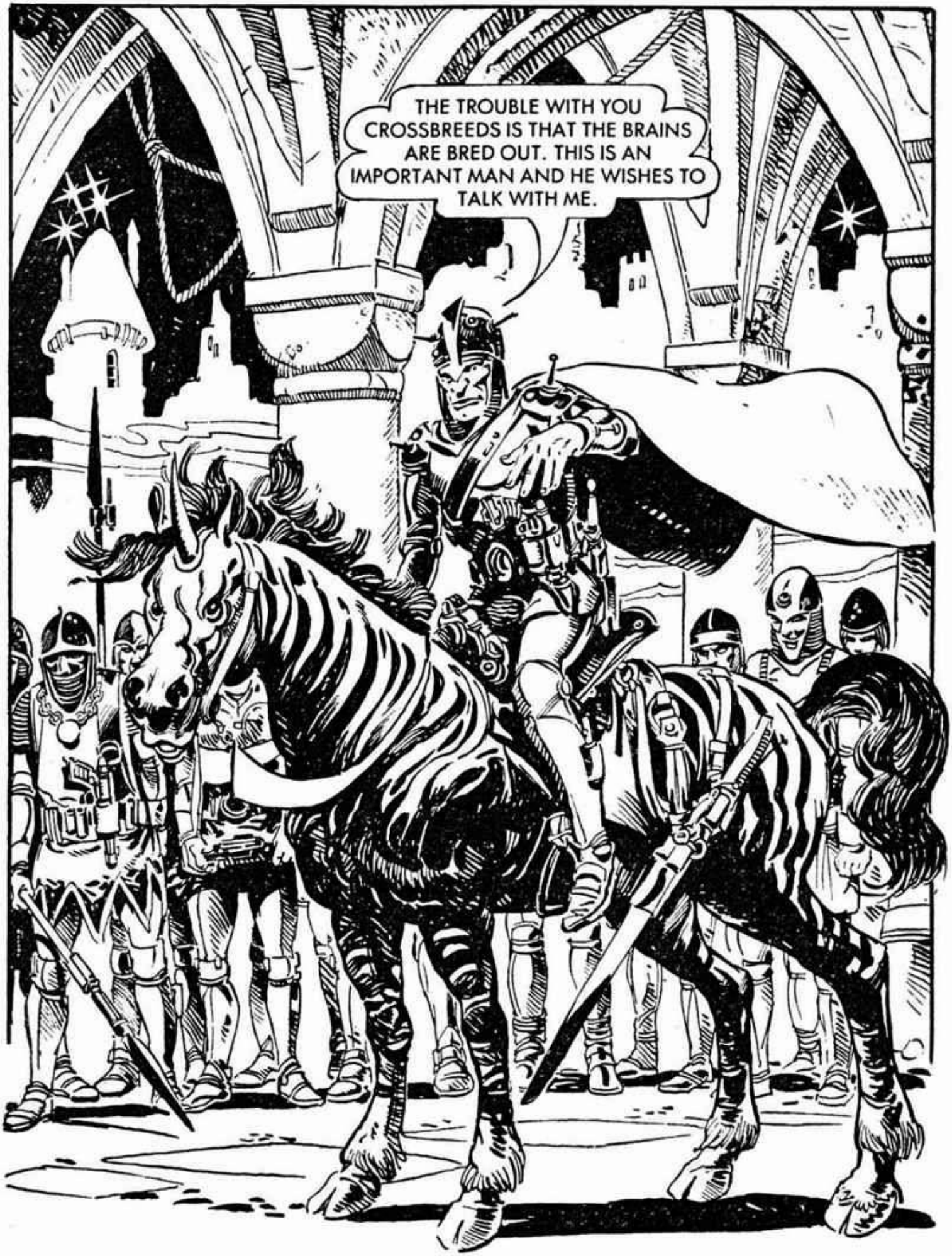
WELL, SEE HIM YOU SHALL —

THERE HE IS, TERRAN SCUM. I'M SORRY HE'S NOT SAYING HELLO, BUT HE WENT QUIET AFTER THE FIFTY-FOURTH LASH.

YOU'VE A CHANCE TO BEAT THE RECORD IF YOU CAN SURVIVE FIFTY-FIVE LASHES.
WHAT ON EARTH HAS HAPPENED HERE?

IT'LL BE GOOD SPORT TO SEE A GALAC-SQUAD SCUMBAG DANCING IN THE AIR.

STOP!


THE TROUBLE WITH YOU CROSSBREEDS IS THAT THE BRAINS ARE BRED OUT. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT MAN AND HE WISHES TO TALK WITH ME.

I DO? SO YOU AREN'T CARRYING OUT YOUR THREAT TO DESTROY EARTH, LEONOTUS! IS THE JOB TOO BIG FOR YOU?
I CAN AFFORD TO WAIT, NOW THAT ARENAL IS MINE.

HOWEVER, I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR CIRRUS-BEAM! WHILE YOU RETREATED TO SEE WHY IT DIDN'T WORK, I RETURNED TO CANPASTIA WITH THESE MUTATED SCUM AND TOOK OVER.

I HAVE NO DESIRE TO DESTROY EARTH, AS LONG AS I CAN BE THE SUPREME OVERLORD OF ARENAL. YOU DON'T SEEM VERY TALKATIVE . . . PERHAPS EXERCISE WILL LOOSEN YOUR TONGUE?

AFTER A SHORT TRIP—
PUT THE TERRAN IN THE DUNGEONS UNTIL HE RECOVERS.

LEONOTUS HAD IMPRISONED ALL FROM ARENAL WHO HAD STAYED LOYAL TO THEIR KING OR COLLABORATED WITH GALAC-SQUAD.
HOW DO YOU FEEL, MY TERRAN FRIEND?
I'LL LIVE.
YOU LOOK AT THESE PRIMITIVE DUNGEONS CLOSELY. DON'T LET THE APPEARANCE FOOL YOU — THERE'S MODERN LOCKS AND SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT, AS WELL AS THE GUARD OUTSIDE.
PERHAPS . . .

. . . BUT LEONOTUS DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO SEARCH A PRISONER FOR HIDDEN MICRO-PROCESSORS.

A SENSOR AND TAPPING DEVICE ALWAYS COMES IN HANDY.
FFZZZZZ

HADRON ATTACHED AN AUTOKEY TO THE DOOR —
FFZZZ
EVERYONE STAY STILL.
FFZZZ
HUH? WHAT'S HAPPENING?

VAS ISH . . .
. . . GOING ON?
THUMP
IT NEVER FAILS—CURIOSITY ALWAYS CAUSES PROBLEMS.

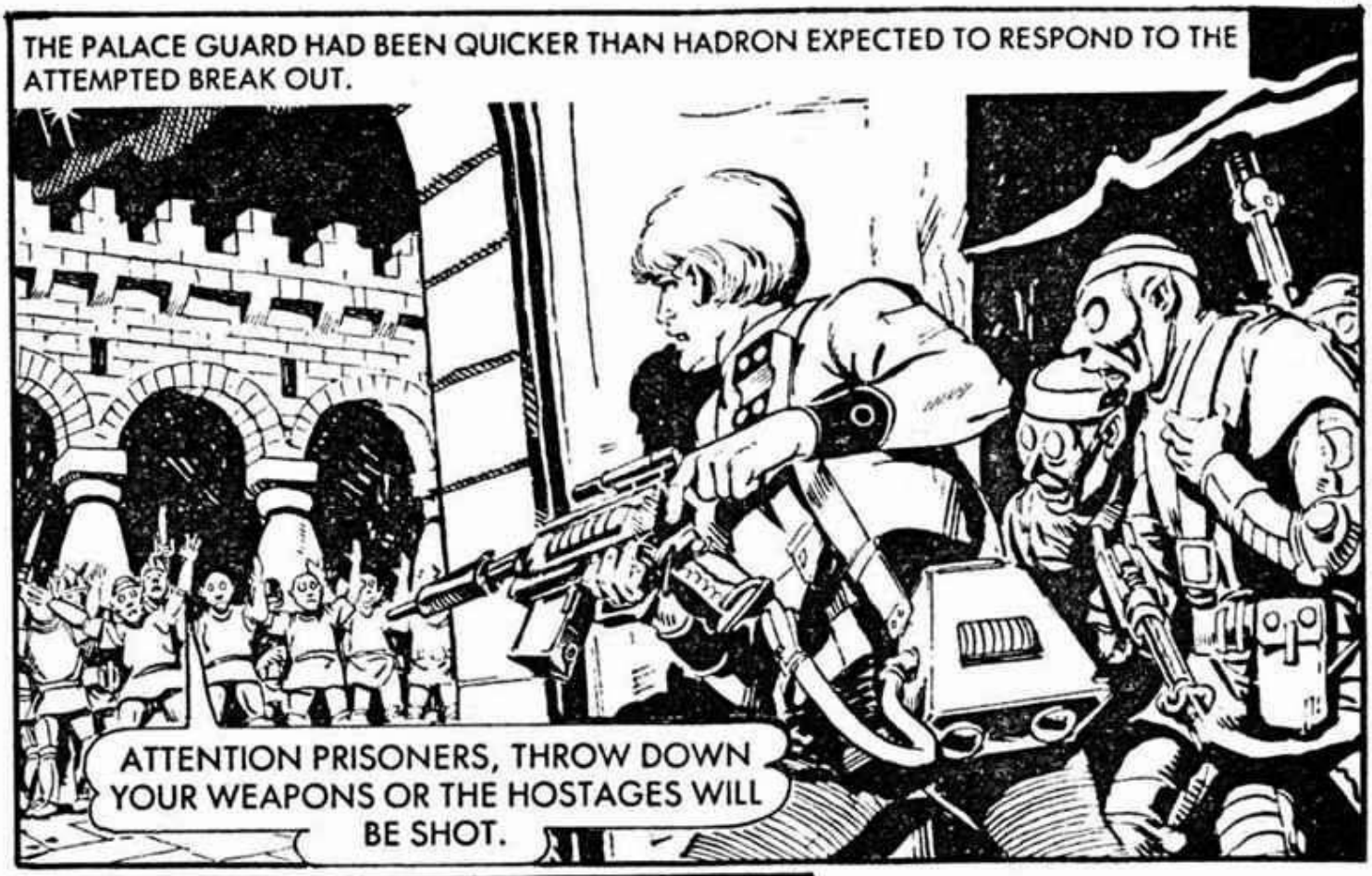
NOBODY IS TO MOVE OUTSIDE THAT CELL DOOR UNTIL I GIVE THEM THE ALL CLEAR, UNDERSTOOD?
THE GUARDS CONTROL PACK GIVES ME ACCESS TO EVERY CIRCUIT IN THE ELECTRONIC DEFENCE SYSTEM.

HADRON WAS ABLE TO DEACTIVATE THE SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS AND PHOTO-ELECTRIC DETECTION BEAMS.
WE NEED TO GET EVERYONE ARMED BEFORE WE TACKLE THE PALACE GARRISON.
THE ARSENAL IS ACROSS THE COURTYARD.
THE GUARDS WILL CUT US DOWN BEFORE WE'RE HALFWAY ACROSS THE COURTYARD, IT'S HOPELESS MY FRIEND.
IT'S NOT EVEN THAT GOOD!

I'M GOING TO TURN THE SEARCHLIGHTS FULL ONTO THE GUARD ROOM DOOR; WHEN I DO, MAKE A DASH FOR THE ARSENAL.
HADRON USED HIS CAPTURED CONTROL PACK TO ALTER THE POSITION OF THE LIGHTS—
WHAT'S GOING ON?
I CAN'T SEE A THING!
USE YOUR GUN TO BLAST THE DOORLOCK AS SOON AS IT'S IN RANGE.

THE GUARDS HAVE ALREADY SEEN US.

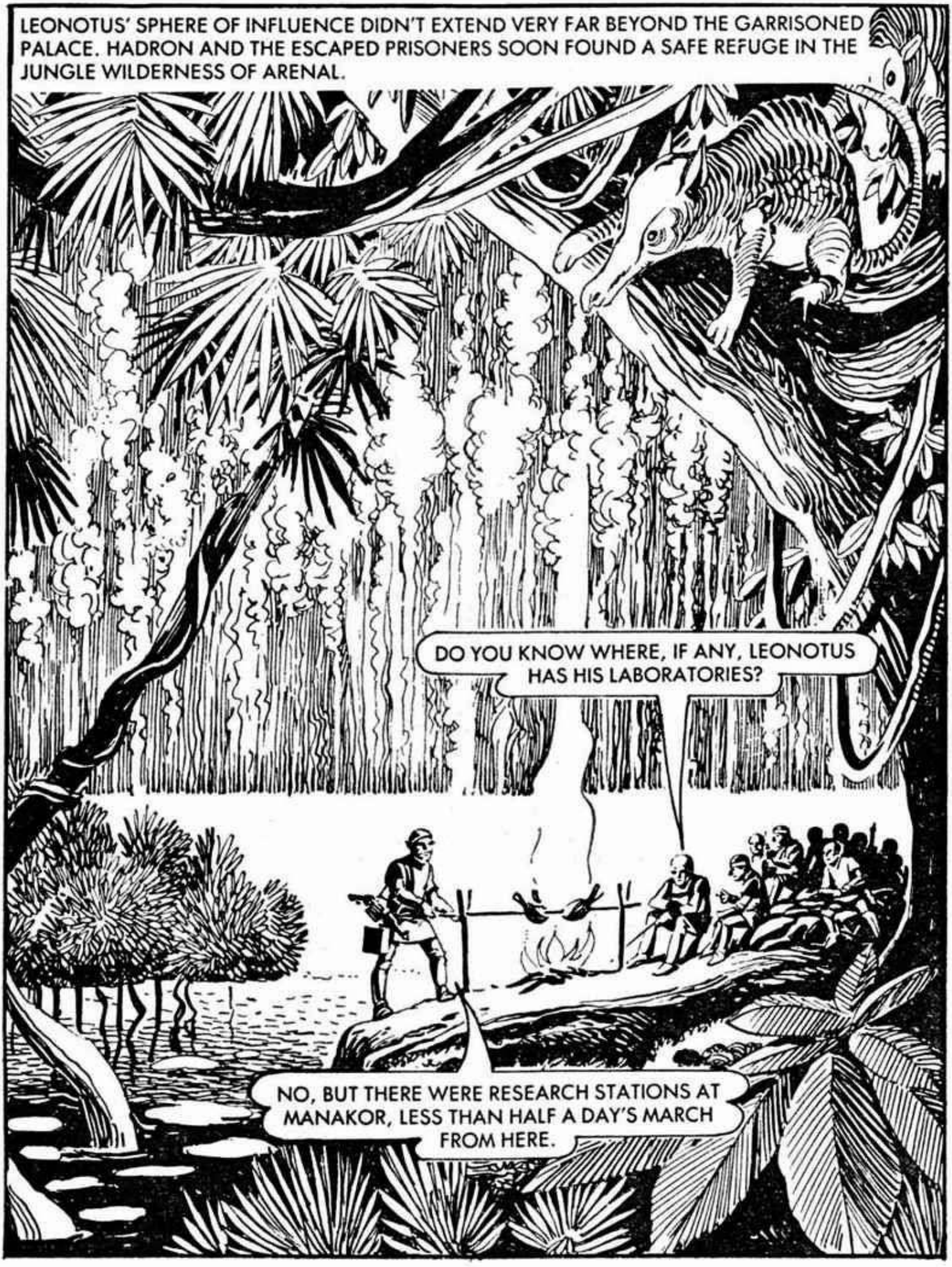
THEY'VE STRIPPED MY SHIP OF EQUIPMENT AND BROUGHT IT ALL HERE, INCLUDING THE CIRRUS-BEAM PROJECTOR. NOW WE'VE GOT A FIGHTING CHANCE!


THE PALACE GUARD HAD BEEN QUICKER THAN HADRON EXPECTED TO RESPOND TO THE ATTEMPTED BREAK OUT.
ATTENTION PRISONERS, THROW DOWN YOUR WEAPONS OR THE HOSTAGES WILL BE SHOT.

QUICKLY HADRON PROGRAMMED THE PROJECTOR.
HERE'S YOUR ANSWER!

HADRON AIMED AT THE LIVING BARRIER.

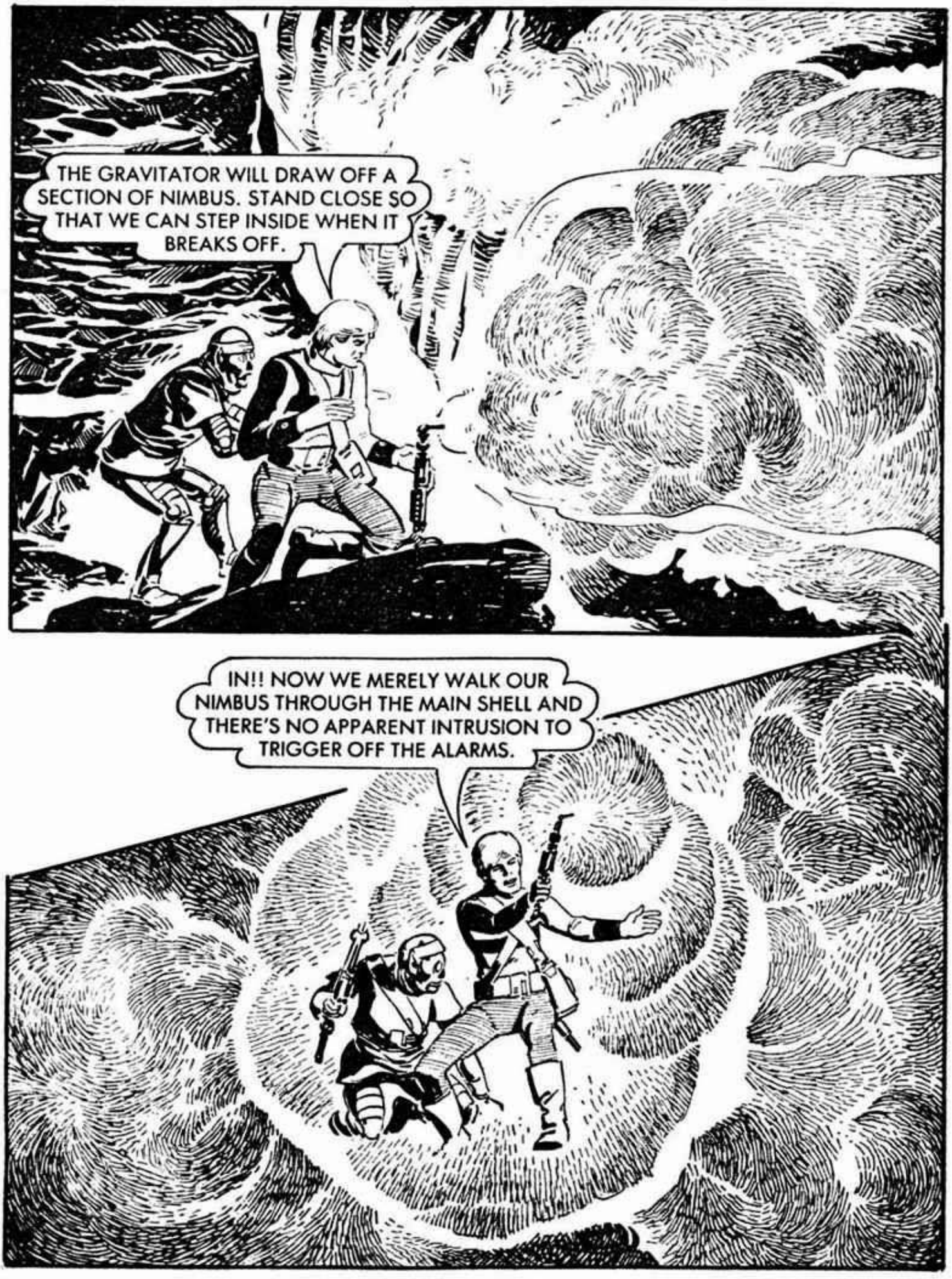
. . . THE CIRRUS-BEAM, AS PROGRAMMED, PASSED HARMLESSLY THROUGH THE WALL OF HOSTAGES AND FOCUSSED ON THE PALACE GUARDS.
AIIIII!!
STAY CLOSE. I KNOW A SAFE ROUTE ONCE WE'RE IN OPEN COUNTRY.
I'LL BE LIKE A SHADOW.

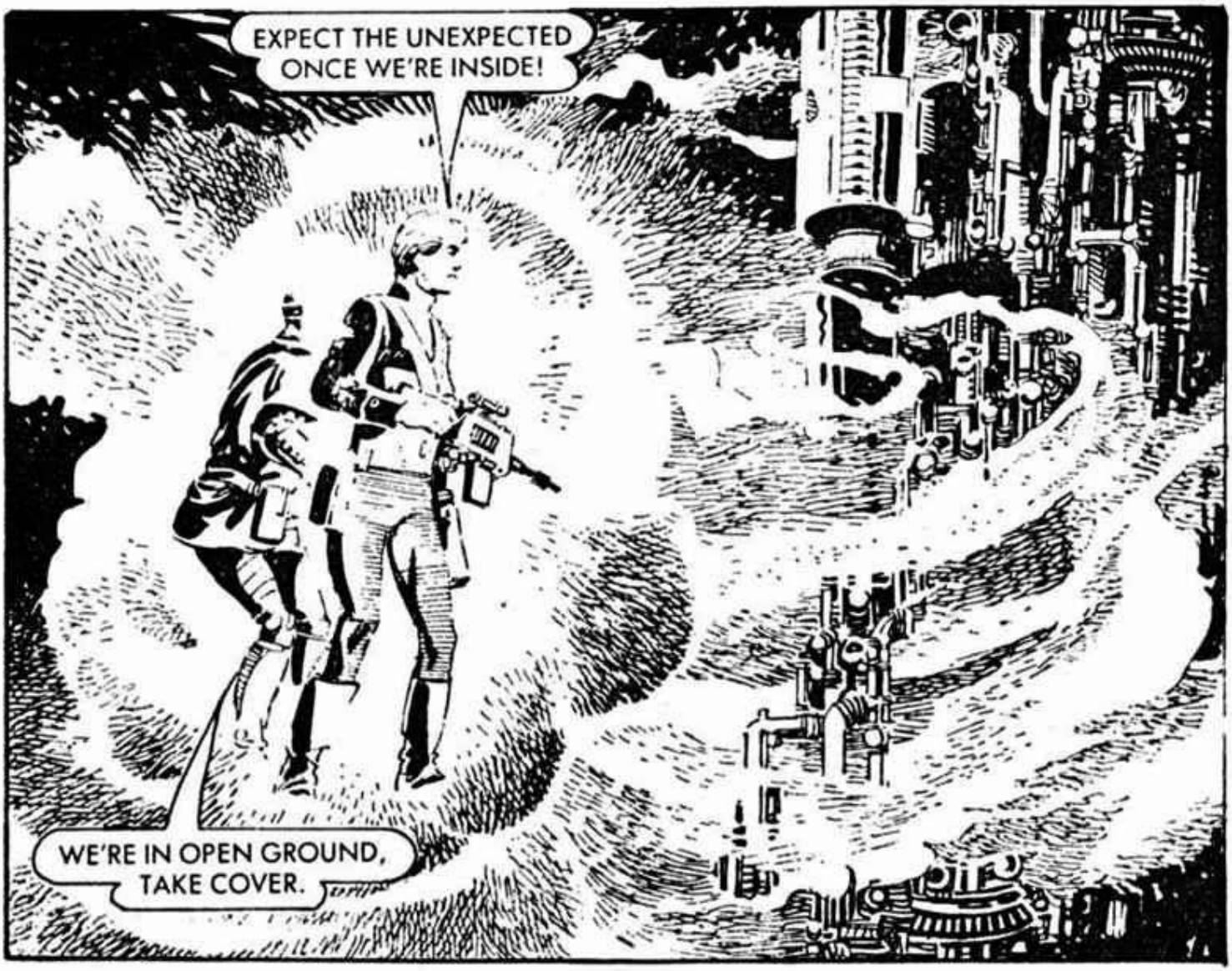

LEONOTUS' SPHERE OF INFLUENCE DIDN'T EXTEND VERY FAR BEYOND THE GARRISONED PALACE. HADRON AND THE ESCAPED PRISONERS SOON FOUND A SAFE REFUGE IN THE JUNGLE WILDERNESS OF ARENAL.
DO YOU KNOW WHERE, IF ANY, LEONOTUS HAS HIS LABORATORIES?
NO, BUT THERE WERE RESEARCH STATIONS AT MANAKOR, LESS THAN HALF A DAY'S MARCH FROM HERE.

BY DAWN, HADRON AND HIS ARENAL LOYALIST COMPANION HAD REACHED THE RESEARCH STATION AT MANAKOR—

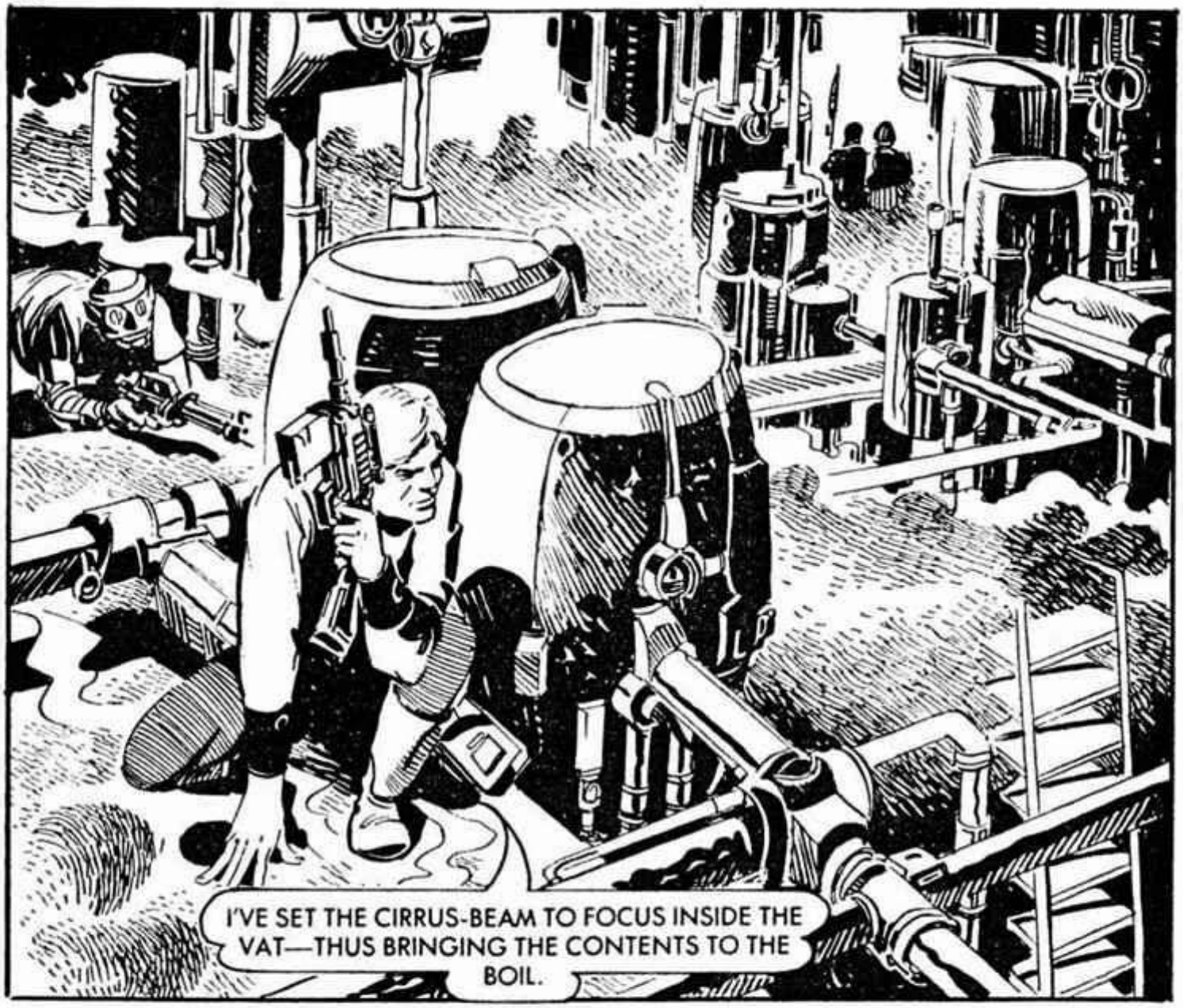
IT'S AN ELECTRONIC SHIELD, NOT A FORCE SHIELD, BUT IT'S ODDS ON IT WOULD INSTANTLY DETECT AN INTRUDER AND ALERT THE GUARD.

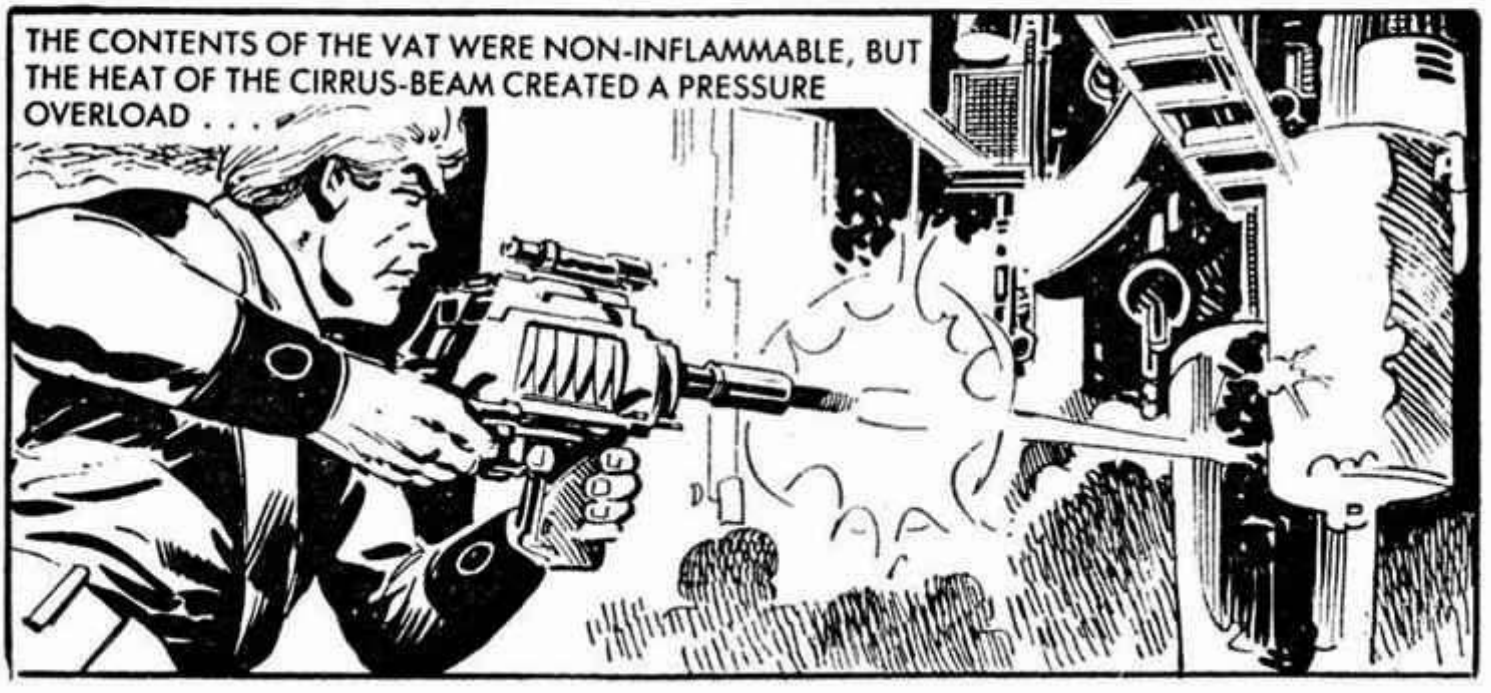
HADRON QUICKLY ASSEMBLED A DEVICE—
ANALYSIS SHOWS THAT THE NIMBUS FORMS ROUND A GRAVITY NODE, I'M CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE NODE WITH THE GRAVITATOR.


THE GRAVITATOR WILL DRAW OFF A SECTION OF NIMBUS. STAND CLOSE SO THAT WE CAN STEP INSIDE WHEN IT BREAKS OFF.
IN!! NOW WE MERELY WALK OUR NIMBUS THROUGH THE MAIN SHELL AND THERE'S NO APPARENT INTRUSION TO TRIGGER OFF THE ALARMS.


EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED ONCE WE'RE INSIDE!
WE'RE IN OPEN GROUND, TAKE COVER.

HADRON SWITCHED OFF THE GRAVITATOR ONCE THEY WERE THROUGH THE MAIN NIMBUS SHIELD—
NOBODY APPEARS TO HAVE SPOTTED US.

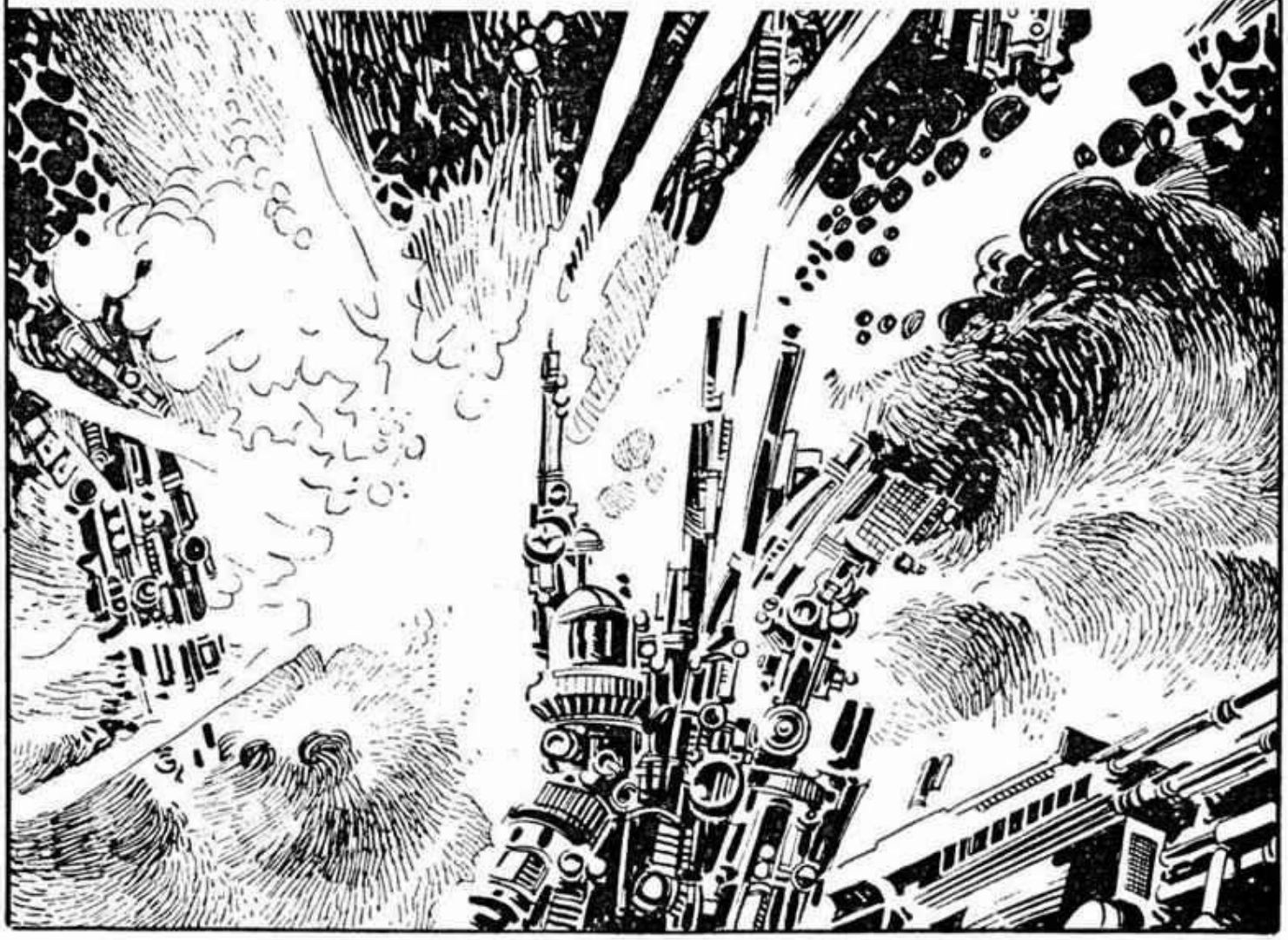

I'VE SET THE CIRRUS-BEAM TO FOCUS INSIDE THE VAT—THUS BRINGING THE CONTENTS TO THE BOIL.


THE CONTENTS OF THE VAT WERE NON-INFLAMMABLE, BUT THE HEAT OF THE CIRRUS-BEAM CREATED A PRESSURE OVERLOAD . . .

. . . THE SAFETY VALVES WERE SUBJECTED TO FORCES WAY BEYOND THEIR DESIGN LIMITS AND FAILED.
AIII! THE PRESSURE READING IS RIGHT OFF THE DIAL, THE VAT WILL NEVER HOLD . . .
THE VALVES DISINTEGRATED—

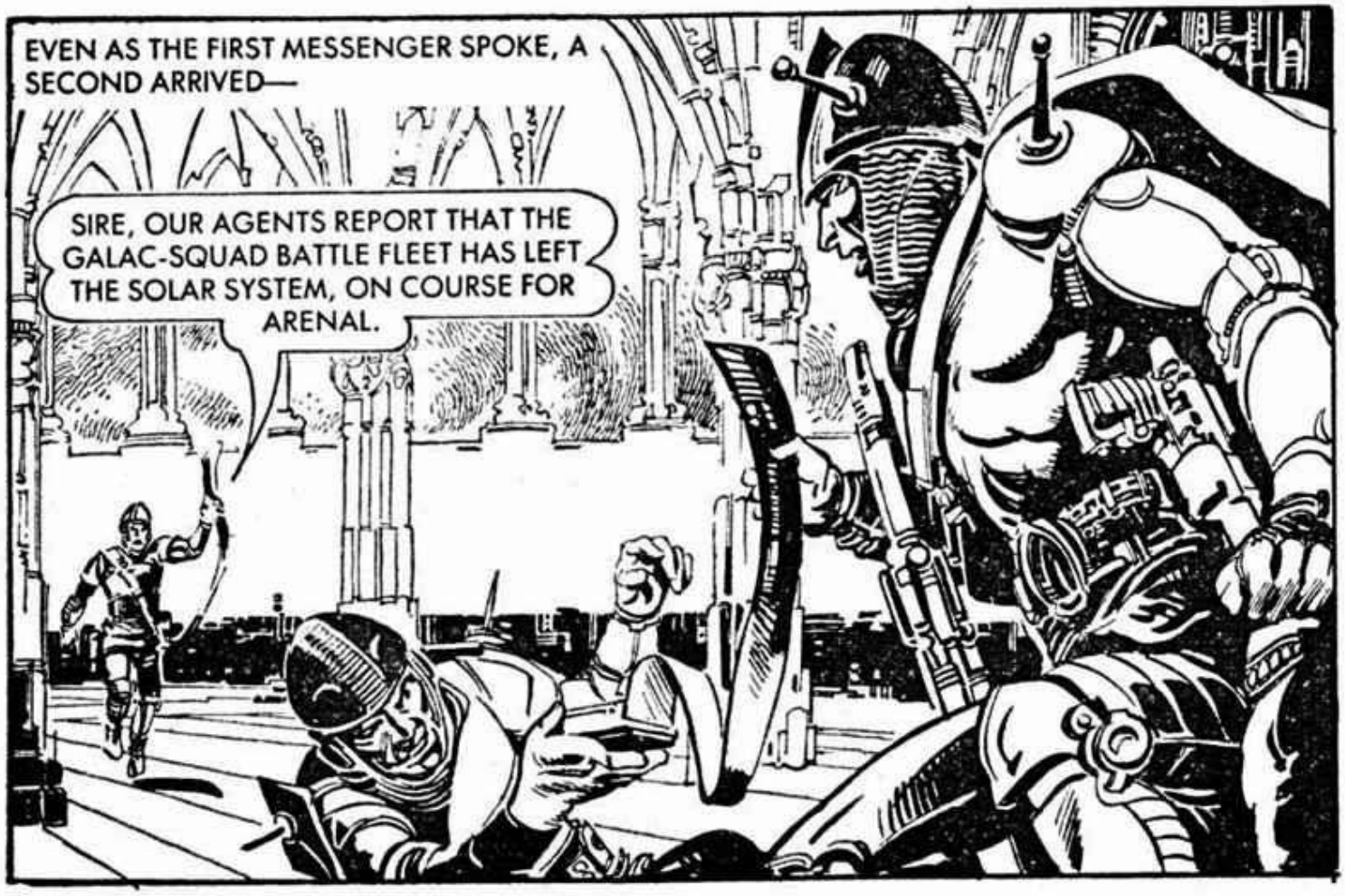
I DON'T THINK THAT LEONOTUS WILL BE MAKING ANY NIMBUS MATERIAL IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

A CASUALTY OF THE BLAST WAS THE GRAVITATOR TOWER WHICH HAD KEPT THE PLANT ENCASED WITHIN A NIMBUS SHIELD.



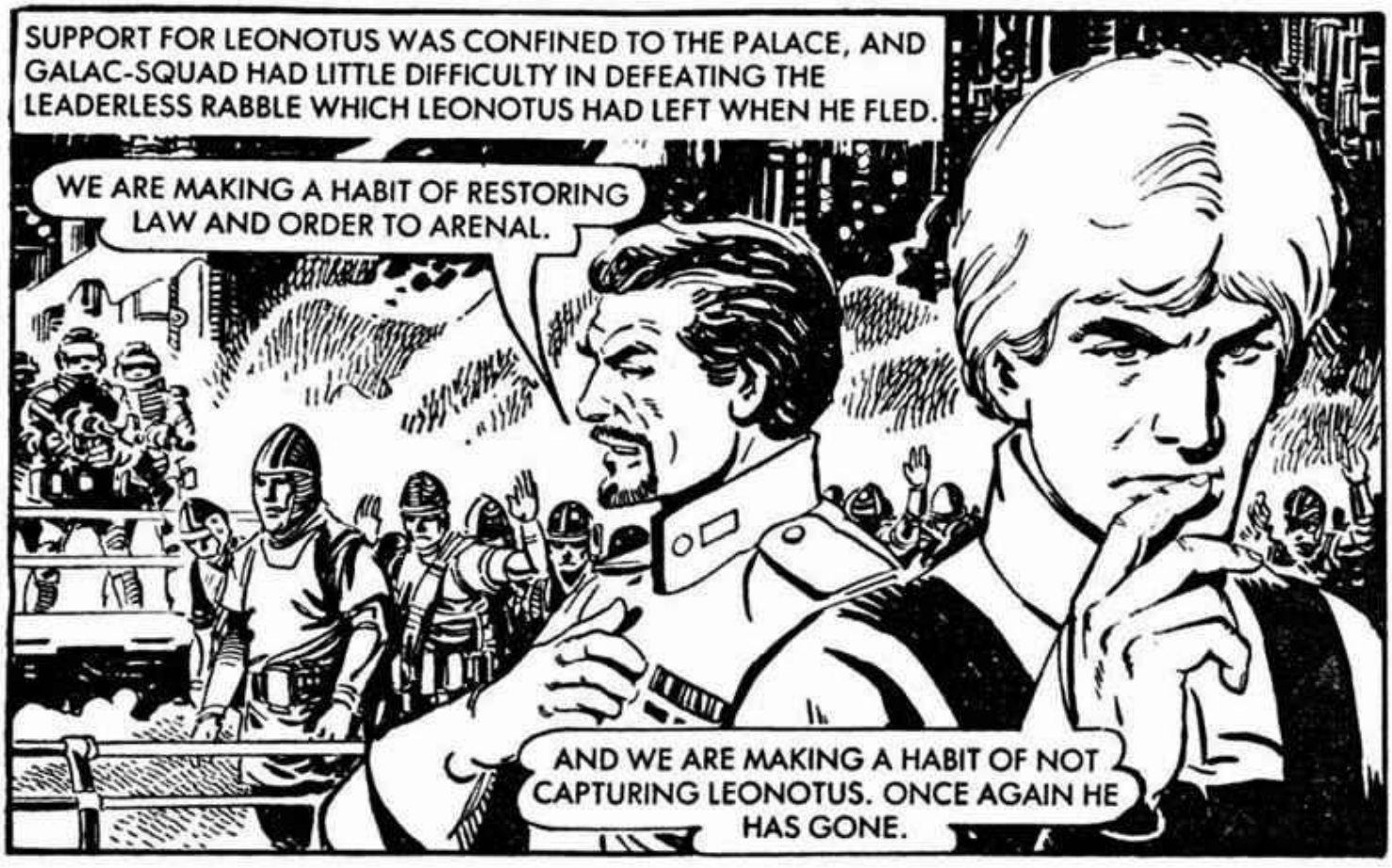
THE ARCHITECT OF THE PLANT'S DESTRUCTION ESCAPED UNNOTICED INTO THE SURROUNDING JUNGLE.

LEONOTUS WAS ALSO SOON MADE AWARE OF HADRON'S ACTIVITIES.
SIRE, YOUR DEPUTY OF SCIENCE REPORTS THAT A MYSTERY EXPLOSION HAS ALL BUT DESTROYED YOUR LABORATORY COMPLEX . . .


EVEN AS THE FIRST MESSENGER SPOKE, A SECOND ARRIVED—
SIRE, OUR AGENTS REPORT THAT THE GALAC-SQUAD BATTLE FLEET HAS LEFT THE SOLAR SYSTEM, ON COURSE FOR ARENAL.

A THIRD MESSENGER ARRIVED —
SIRE, MORE NEWS . . .
NO MORE . . .
SIRE, YOUR SHIP IS IN A SAFE ORBIT ABOVE ARENAL, LOADED WITH ENOUGH NIMBUS MATERIAL TO DESTROY THE EARTH!
I'LL COMPENSATE YOU FOR THAT UNJUST BLOW, MESSENGER, BY ALLOWING YOU TO ACCOMPANY OUR EXPEDITION TO DESTROY THE EARTH.

LEONOTUS SPED OFF ---
I WILL TAKE REFUGE IN DEEP SPACE UNTIL GALAC-SQUAD HAVE LEFT EARTH NAKED TO MY DEADLY NIMBUS-ATTACK.


SUPPORT FOR LEONOTUS WAS CONFINED TO THE PALACE, AND GALAC-SQUAD HAD LITTLE DIFFICULTY IN DEFEATING THE LEADERLESS RABBLE WHICH LEONOTUS HAD LEFT WHEN HE FLED.
WE ARE MAKING A HABIT OF RESTORING LAW AND ORDER TO ARENAL.
AND WE ARE MAKING A HABIT OF NOT CAPTURING LEONOTUS. ONCE AGAIN HE HAS GONE.

LEONOTUS MUST BE FOUND.
NO! THE BATTLE FLEET IS NEEDED ELSEWHERE. IT SEEMS THAT EVERY UPSTART IN THE GALAXY HAS TURNED AGAINST US, WHILE WE WERE HOLED UP IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM. THERE IS URGENT WORK TO BE DONE ELSEWHERE.
GENERAL LARZ PLUTO LED HIS FORCES ON TO PACIFY THE NEXT TROUBLE SPOT.
HE'S MAKING A MISTAKE! LEONOTUS IS THE BIGGEST DANGER.

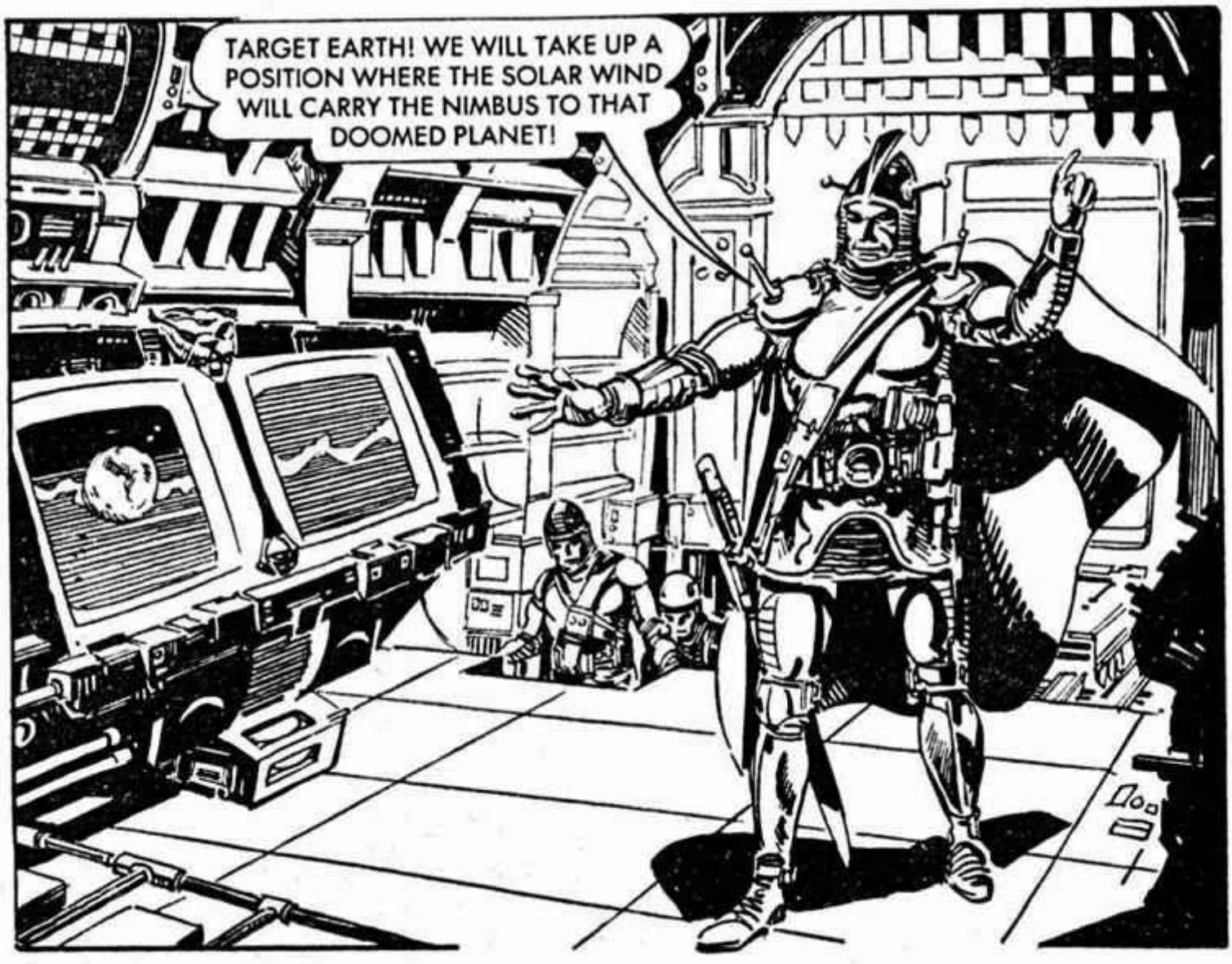
MUCH TO GENERAL PLUTO'S DISGUST, HADRON REFUSED TO GO, AND EXERCISED HIS RIGHT AS A SENIOR OPERATIVE TO HAVE A CRAFT PLACED AT HIS COMMAND.
WELL, HADRON, OL' PLUTO THOUGHT YOU WERE BACKING OUT.
YES, I KNOW, BUT HE'S WRONG. COME ON, SKIP . . . WE'RE GOING TO EARTH.
DURING THE HYPER-FLIGHT TO EARTH, HADRON SUPERVISED MODIFICATIONS TO A SHUTTLE.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, HADRON?
CHANGED IT INTO A LUCAS MK I ATMOSPHERIC FIGHTER — I PINCHED THE DESIGN FROM A DOCUMOVIE I SAW ABOUT A GALACTIC WAR.

ONCE IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM, HADRON LEFT THE MOTHER SHIP.
I WANT MY DIRECT TRANSMIT LINK TO LUNAR OBSERVATORY MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT THE FLIGHT.
CEASELESSLY, HADRON PATROLLED THE UPPER REACHES OF EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE.
LUNAR TO FI-SCI; WE'VE GOT A BEARING ON AN INTRUDER.
FEED THE DATA TO MY SHIPBOARD COMPUTER AND I'LL CHECK IT OUT.

THE NIMBUS SHIELD PROTECTED LEONOTUS AGAINST ELECTRONIC DETECTION BUT GAVE AWAY HIS POSITIVE BY OBSCURING THE BACKGROUND STARS.
FI-SCI TO LUNAR BASE! IT'S LEONOTUS! I'M GOING TO ATTACK.
LEONOTUS' SHIP WAS EQUIPPED WITH REMOTE SENSORS WHICH FED ELECTRONIC DATA FROM BEYOND THE NIMBUS SHIELD, ALONG FIBRE-WIRES TO THE CONTROL CENTRE.
SUPPLIES OF NIMBUS MATERIAL ARE LIMITED BUT THERE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS ATTACKER.

THE NIMBUS WILL HAVE NO EFFECT AS I AM NOT USING ANY ELECTRONICALLY CONTROLLED WEAPON SYSTEMS.
BUT HADRON HAD OVERLOOKED THE EMISSIONS FROM HIS TRANSMIT LINK WITH LUNAR BASE. THEY WERE REFLECTED BACK FROM THE NIMBUS CAUSING HIS TRANSMITTER TO OVERLOAD.
JUPE, THAT POWER SURGE HAS STARTED A FIRE!

SEE HOW EASILY THE FORCES OF GALAC-SQUAD FALL VICTIM TO MY SCIENCE.

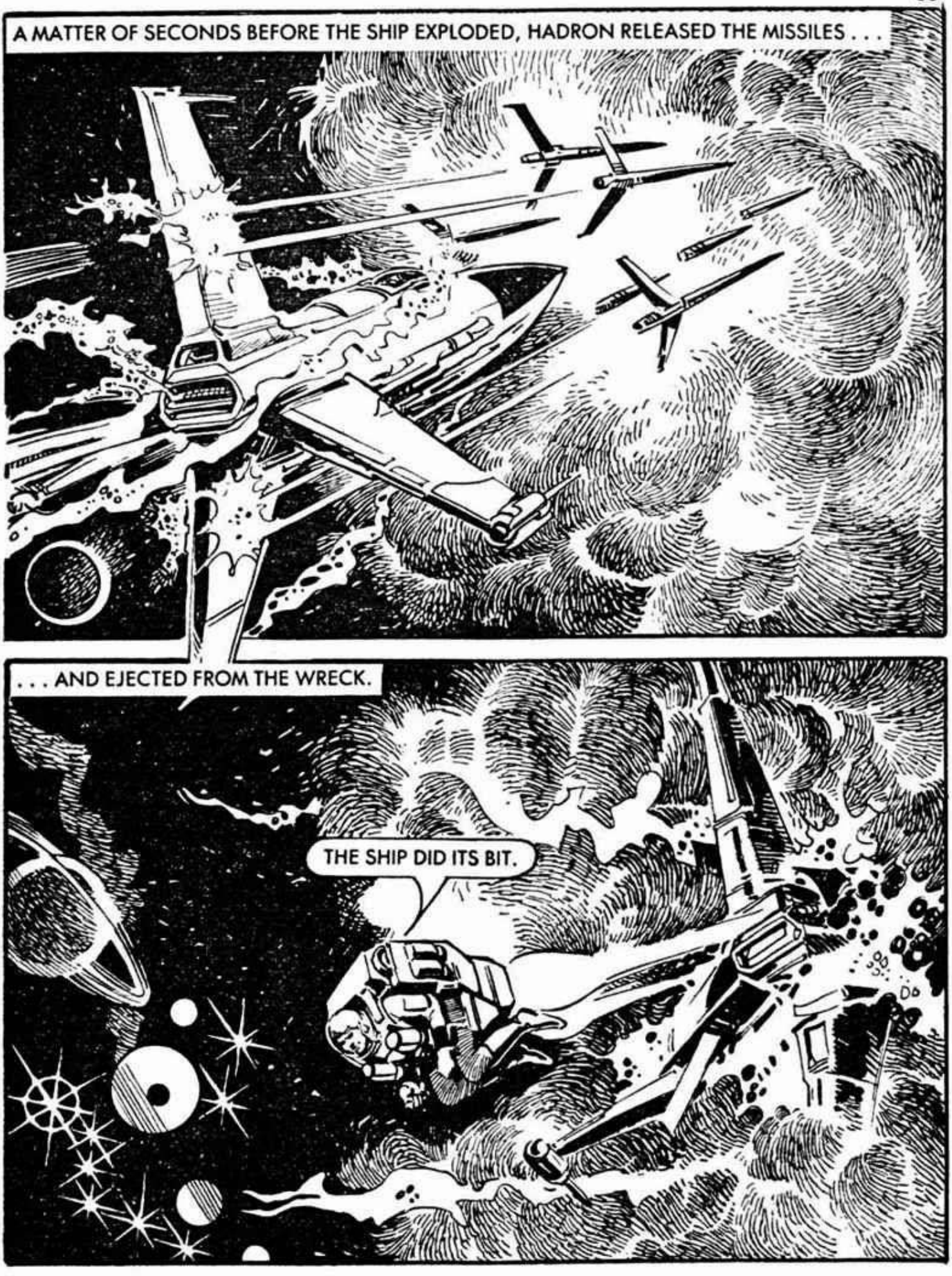

TARGET EARTH! WE WILL TAKE UP A POSITION WHERE THE SOLAR WIND WILL CARRY THE NIMBUS TO THAT DOOMED PLANET!

THE MAIN CONTROLS ARE BURNT OUT, BUT THE EMERGENCY BACK-UP UNITS IN THE DRIVE CHAMBER MIGHT HAVE SURVIVED.

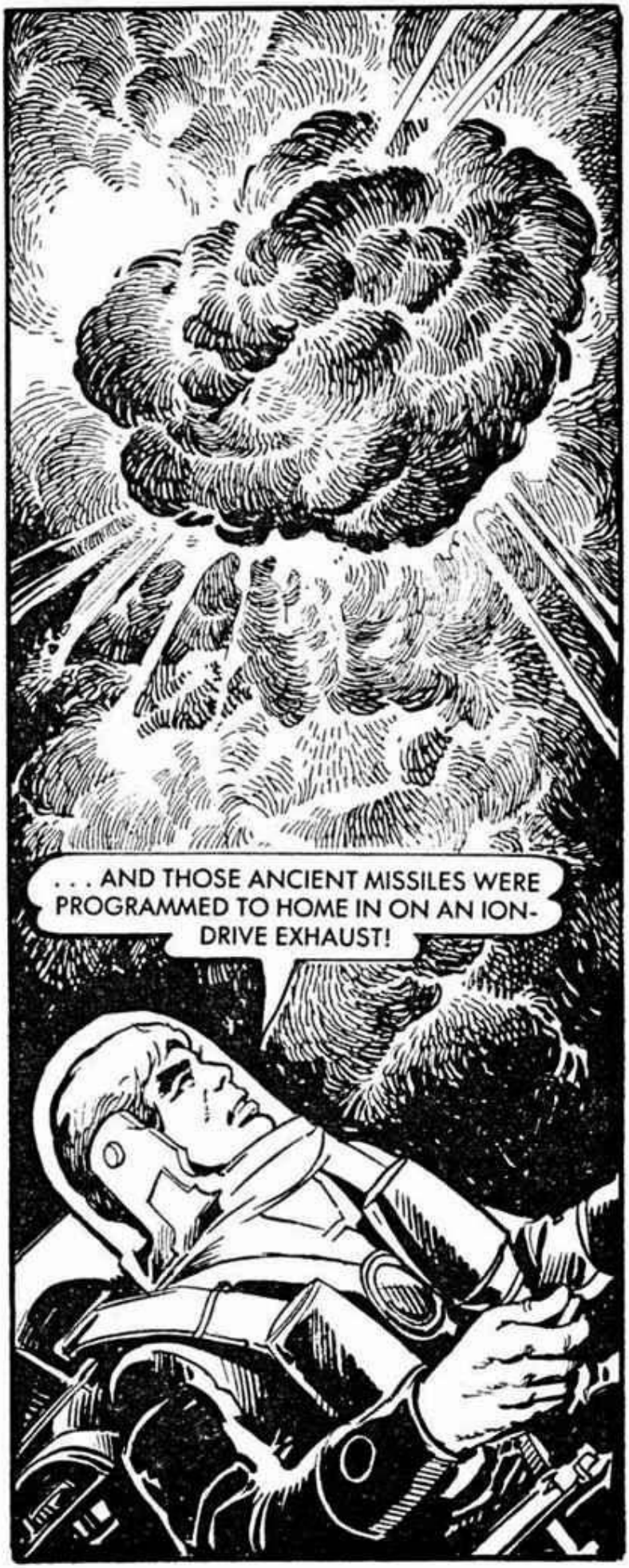
MAIN DRIVE AND GUIDANCE SYSTEMS ARE UNSERVICEABLE, LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE; ONLY THE MISSILE SYSTEM REMAINS 100% OPERATIONAL.

HADRON FIRED THE MISSILES' OWN PROPULSION UNITS WITHOUT RELEASING THEM.

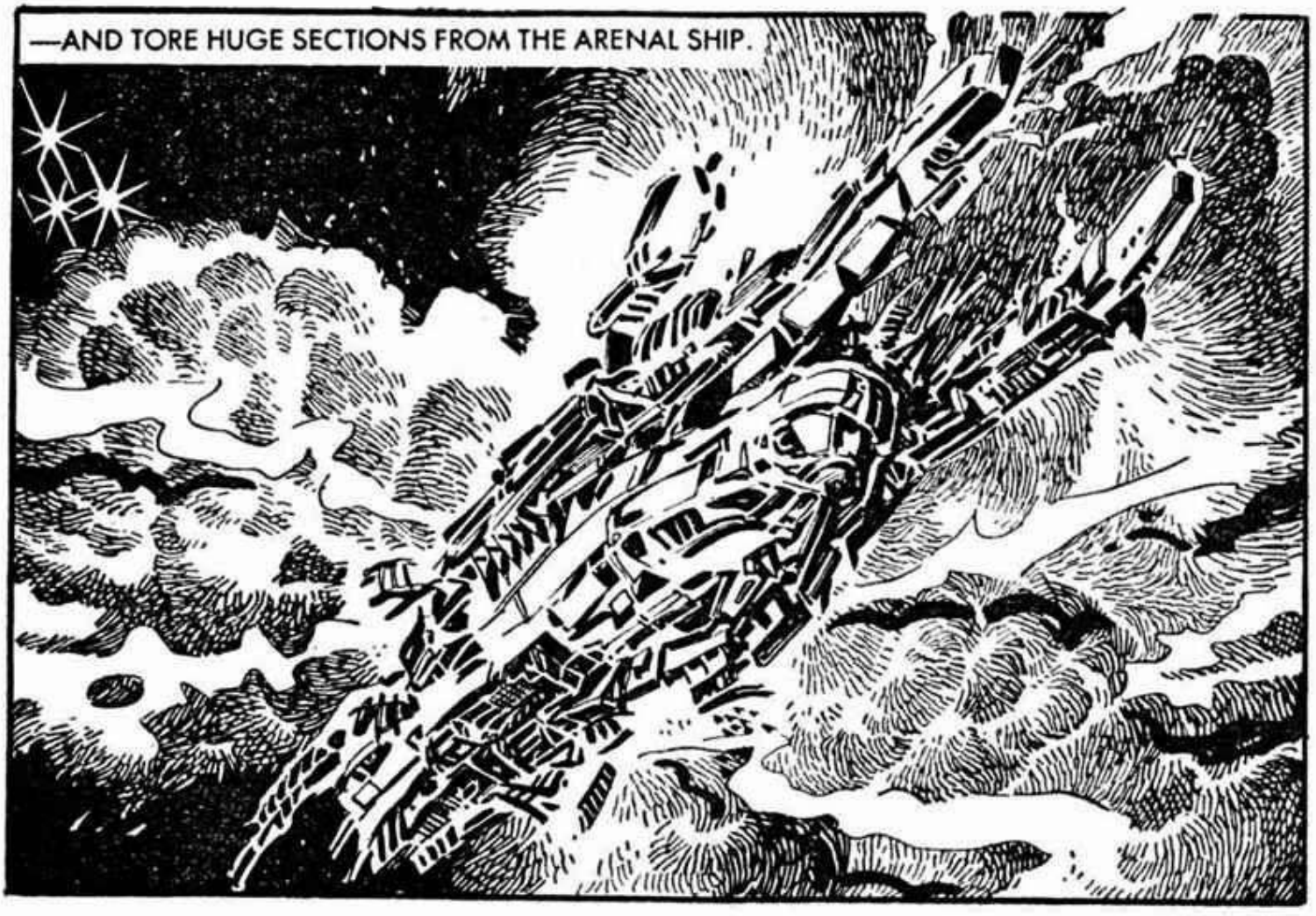
NOW I CAN GET BACK INTO THE FIGHT WITH LEONOTUS!
THE SHIP SHOULD HOLD TOGETHER JUST LONG ENOUGH TO LOCK THOSE MISSILES ON TO LEONOTUS.

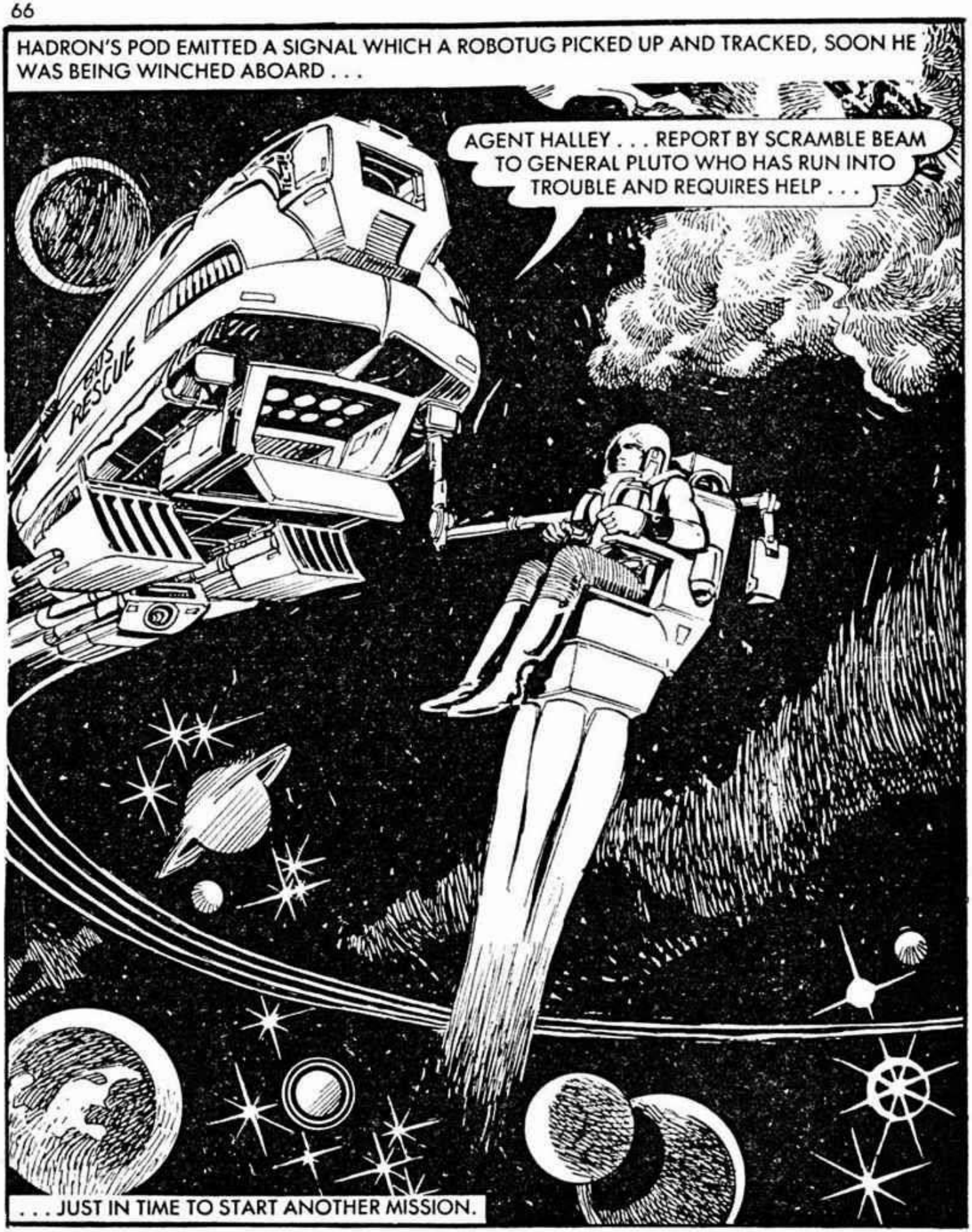

A MATTER OF SECONDS BEFORE THE SHIP EXPLODED, HADRON RELEASED THE MISSILES . . .
. . . AND EJECTED FROM THE WRECK.
THE SHIP DID ITS BIT.

FOR LEONOTUS TO USE THE NIMBUS AS A SHIELD, IT HAD TO ALLOW THE EXHAUST FROM HIS ION-DRIVE TO ESCAPE UNREFLECTED . . .


. . . AND THOSE ANCIENT MISSILES WERE PROGRAMMED TO HOME IN ON AN ION-DRIVE EXHAUST!

TREMENDOUS FORCES BEGAN TO BREAK FREE —


—AND TORE HUGE SECTIONS FROM THE ARENAL SHIP.



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74-75

Just before the end of 1974, on December 2, Soyuz 16 was launched to dock with Salyut 4. It contained Filipchencko and Rokavishnikov, both of whom had been in space before. The next craft in this USSR series was Soyuz 17 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gubarev, 42, and crewed by Georgi Grechko, 42. The mission last 29 days 13 hr. 20 min. after launch on January 11, 1975. Both took part in subsequent space flights — Grechko in Soyuz 26 on December 10, 1977 on a 96 day 10 hr. mission, and Gubarev in Soyuz 28 for a 7 day 20 hr. 16 min. mission beginning on March 2, 1978.